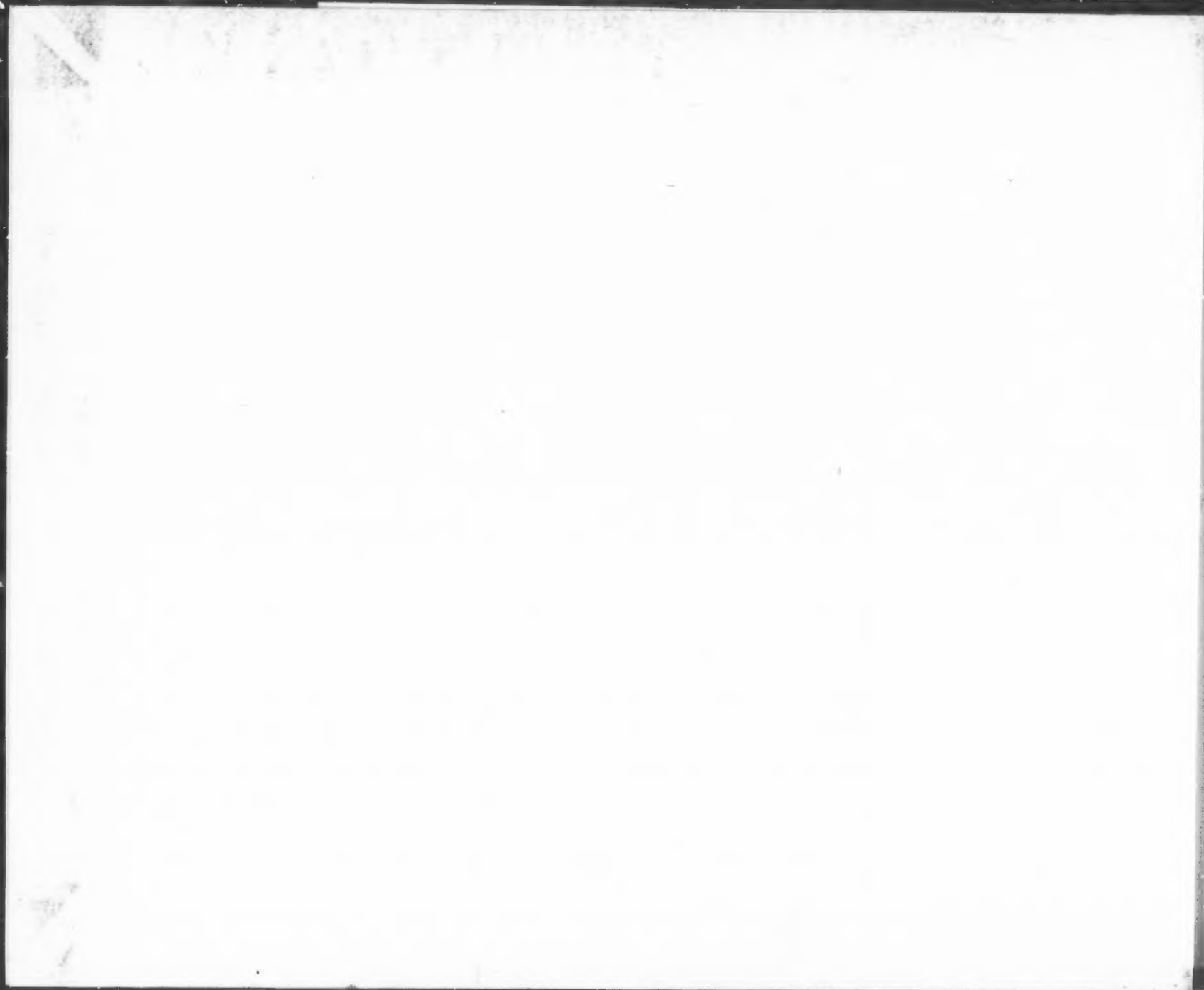
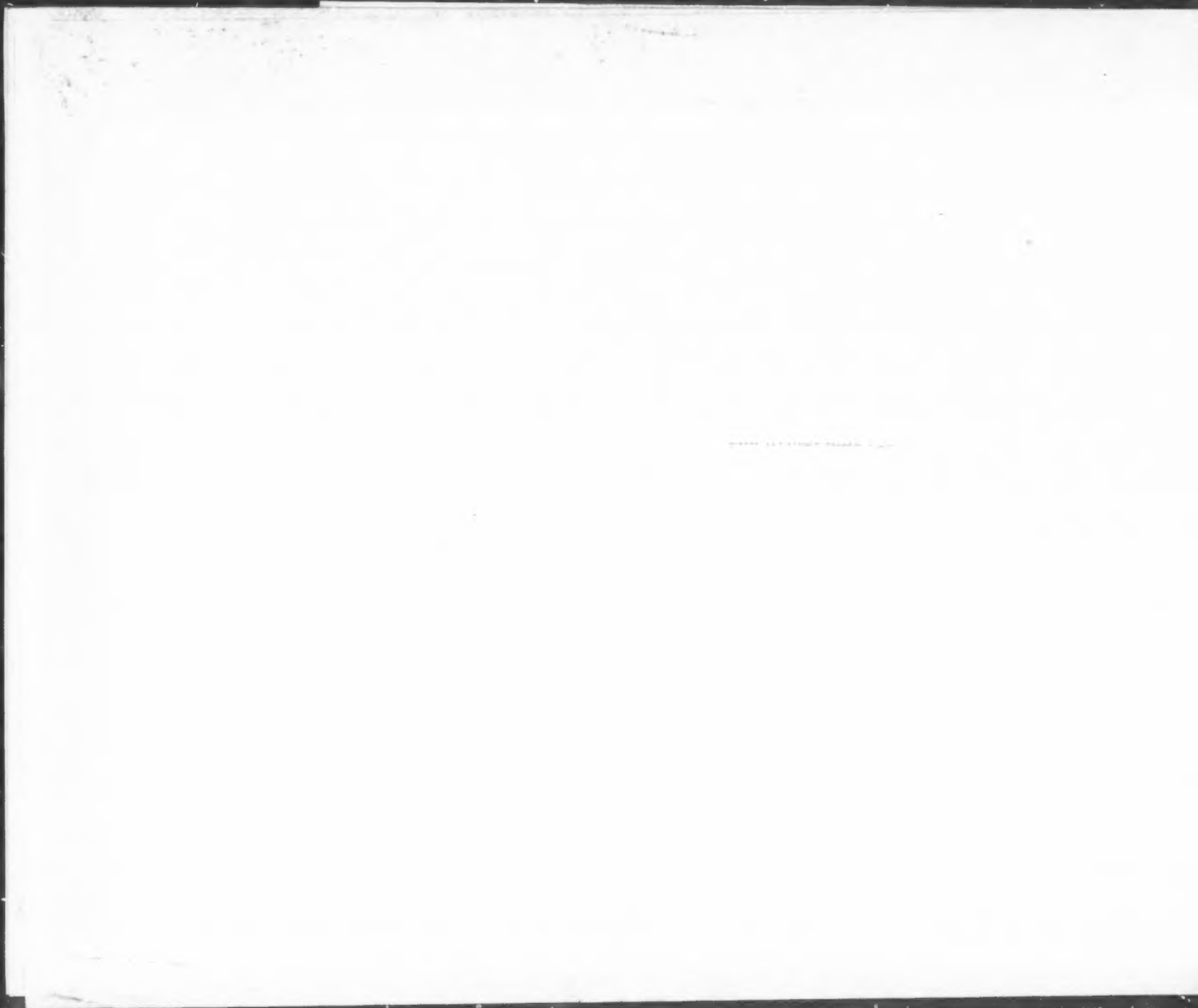




FLORIMEL JONES.

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FLORIMEL JONES.

A Nobel.

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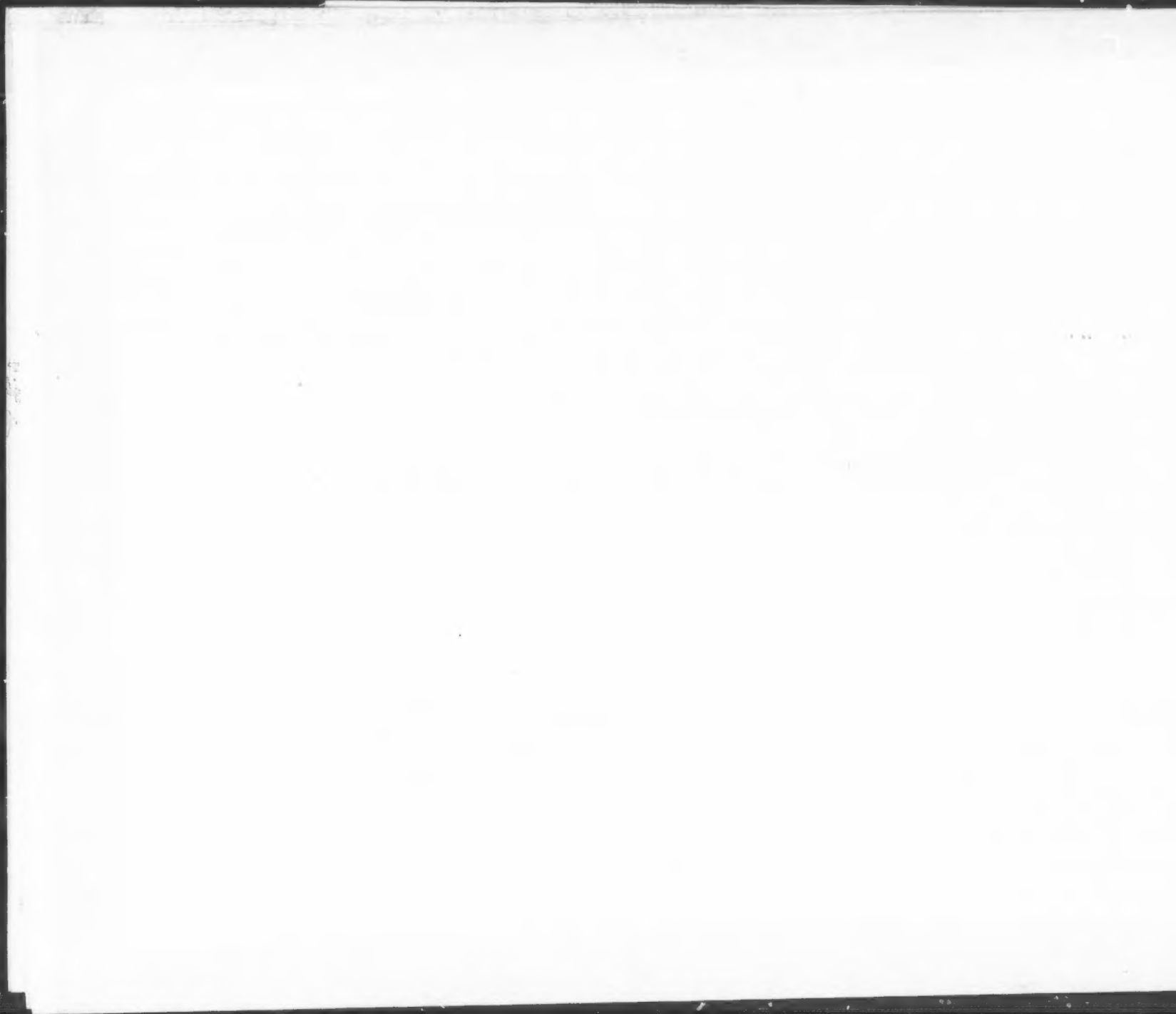
By T. U.

[W. B. Stabb]

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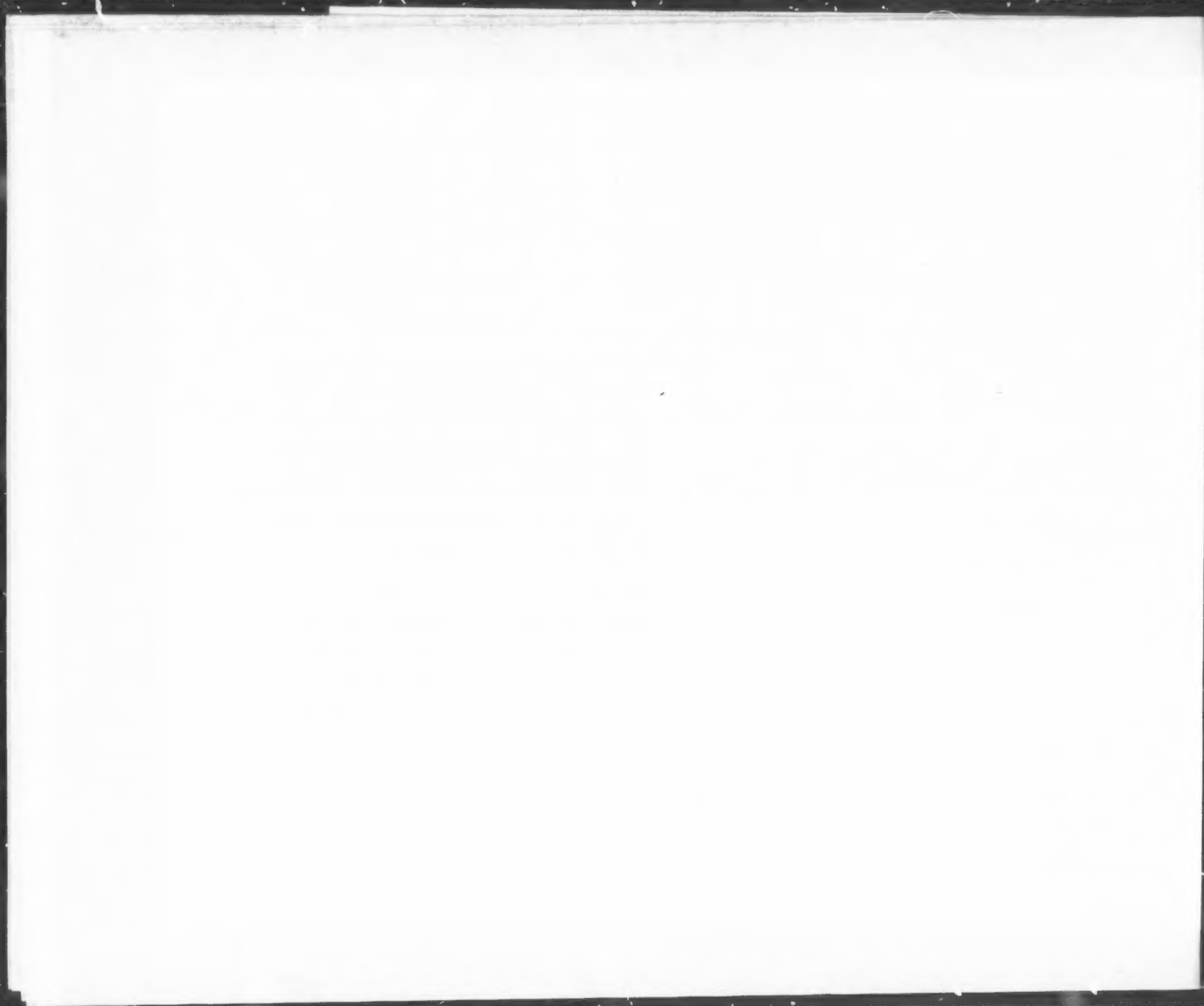
PREFACE.

It is only fair to premise that this little volume is merely an *attempt* at authorship. The author is painfully conscious of its many defects. But he never expected to achieve even a moderate excellence in literary art *per saltum*. Criticism and public opinion, however adverse to his modest venture, will only serve to stimulate, not discourage him.

The gifted author of PELHAM has said that the demand now-a-days was simply for something "readable." If FLORIMEL JONES, with all its faults, possesses even this indifferent merit, the author ought not to grumble.

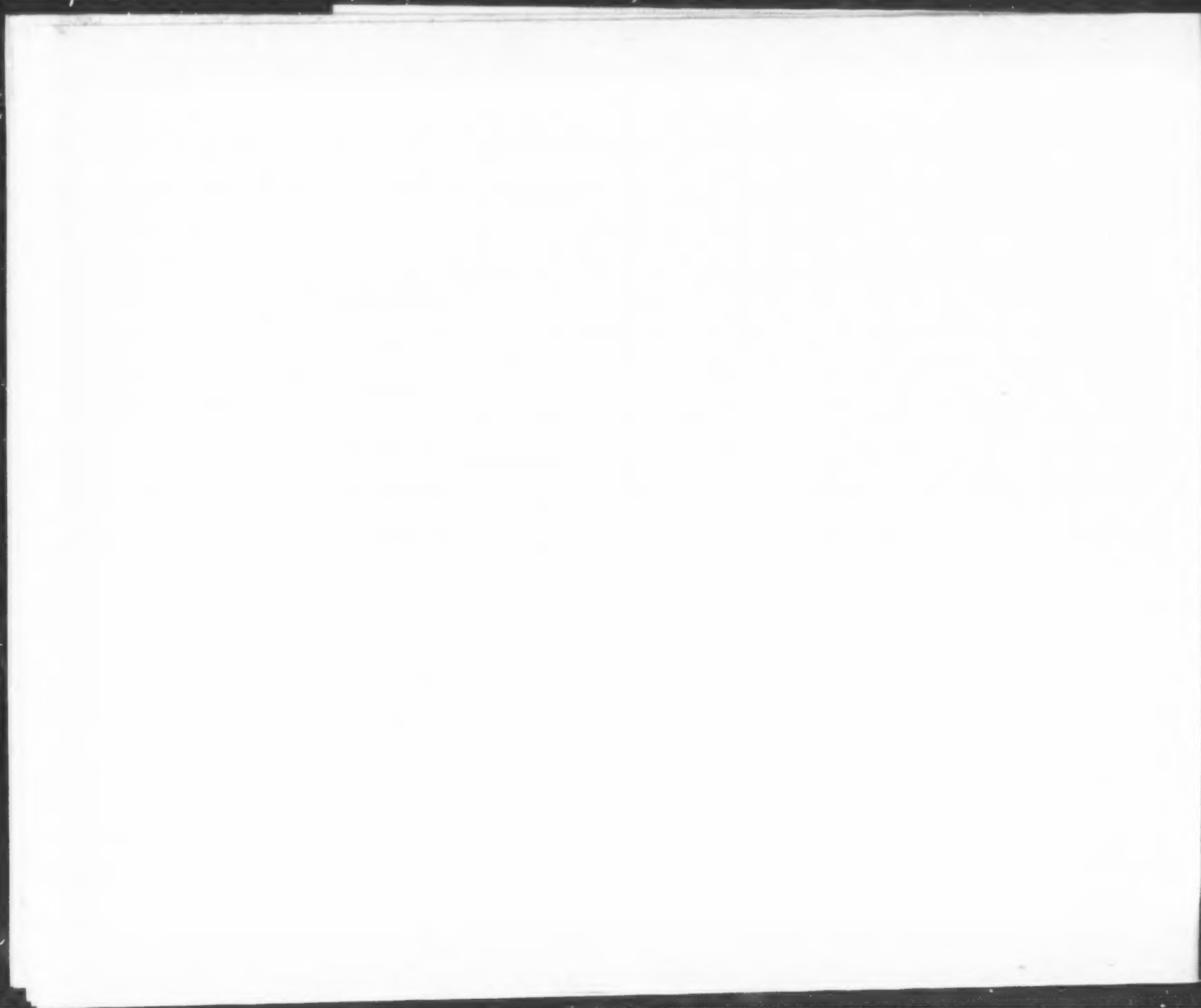
T. U.





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FLORIMEL JONES.

CHAPTER I.

COLDWELL.

NEWFOUNDLAND, the scene of this tale, dubbed a novel by courtesy, is in the eyes of most people a sort of *terra incognita*, shrouded in perpetual fog and mystery. It is thought, indeed, by some to be uninhabited, save by aborigines, who, either redskins or Esquimaux, eke out a precarious subsistence by catching seals and codfish. But we hope to show that such impressions have nothing in point of fact to rest upon. Positively, no redskins or Esquimaux are to be seen there; and, as



for fog and mystery, why, London far exceeds it in both.

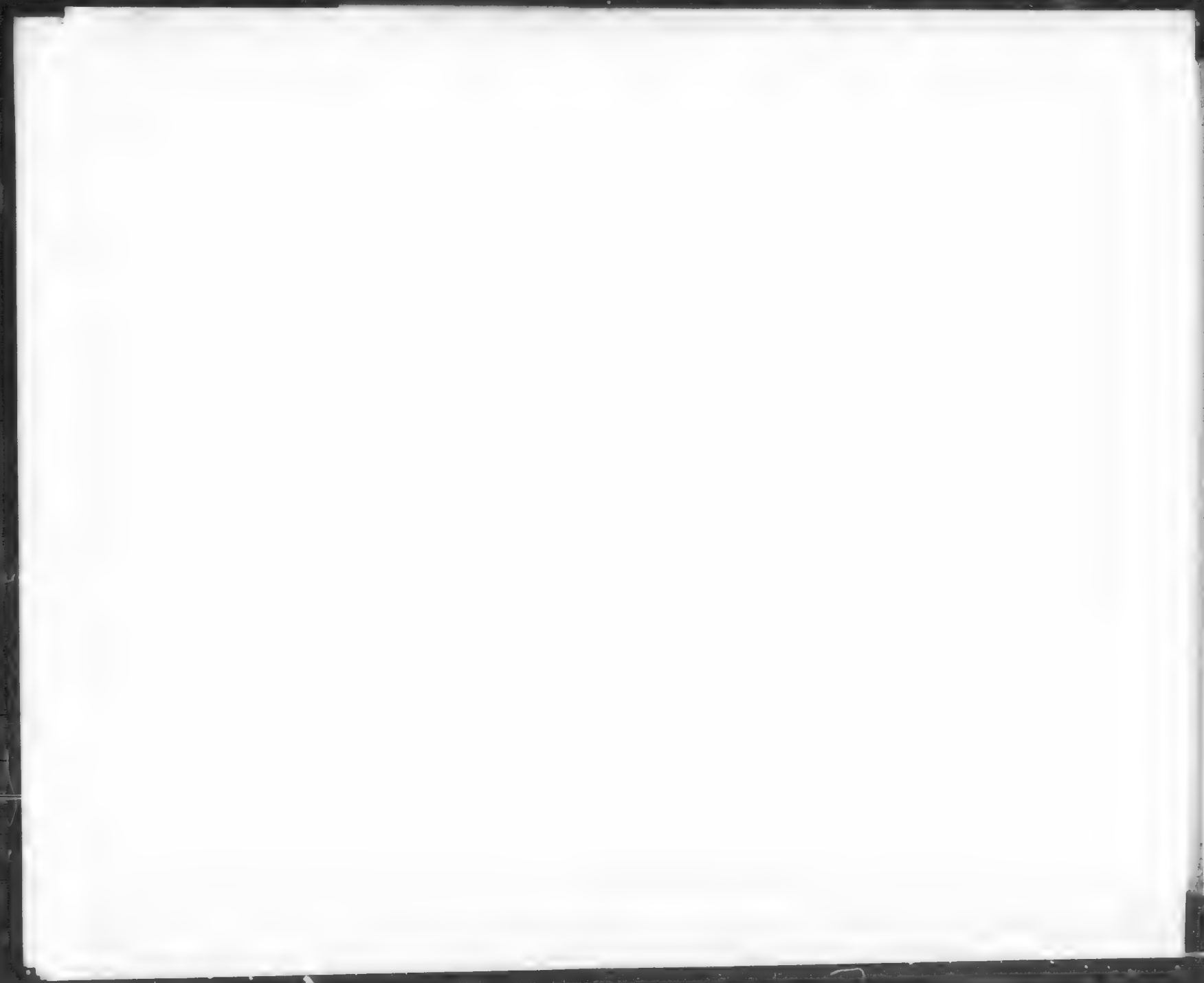
Towards the close of a cold day in January, 18—, two persons were conversing in the front parlour of a fashionable house in one of the most fashionable thoroughfares of a thriving little town, to which, for reasons of our own, we shall give the name of COLDWELL.

The window of the apartment faced a quiet street, covered with snow, and perfectly destitute of attraction, with a general appearance of harsh, unmitigated desolation. At this window, nevertheless, sat a woman, who, despite the blankness of the prospect, gazed out into the street with steadfast purpose.

Of a superb type of physical beauty, this woman seemed born to enkindle passion. Her eyes were dark and gleaming with restrained fire, her teeth white as ivory, her lips the colour of the ruby, her skin smooth

as "monumental alabaster," and raven hair arranged pyramid-like, crowned her head, independent of the aid of artificial *chignon*. Her forehead was broad and low, her nose aquiline, her mouth small, with an expression half-defiant, half-inviting, and well adapted, as some one says somewhere, to "sneer a sneer that's near to scorn." Her age was about eight-and-twenty; her name Mrs. Clarke. Thus much of the lady. It is fully as much as could be gathered by the most observant eye upon a first introduction. A knowledge of her disposition and character will be acquired as our story progresses.

The other occupant of the apartment was a gentleman named Edward Villiers. He was a man about thirty, and he looked his age. His deportment was easy and polished, with a tincture of *nonchalant* impudence, which attracted while it irritated. His eye was hard and cold, almost expressionless; it was a worldling's eye, destitute either of

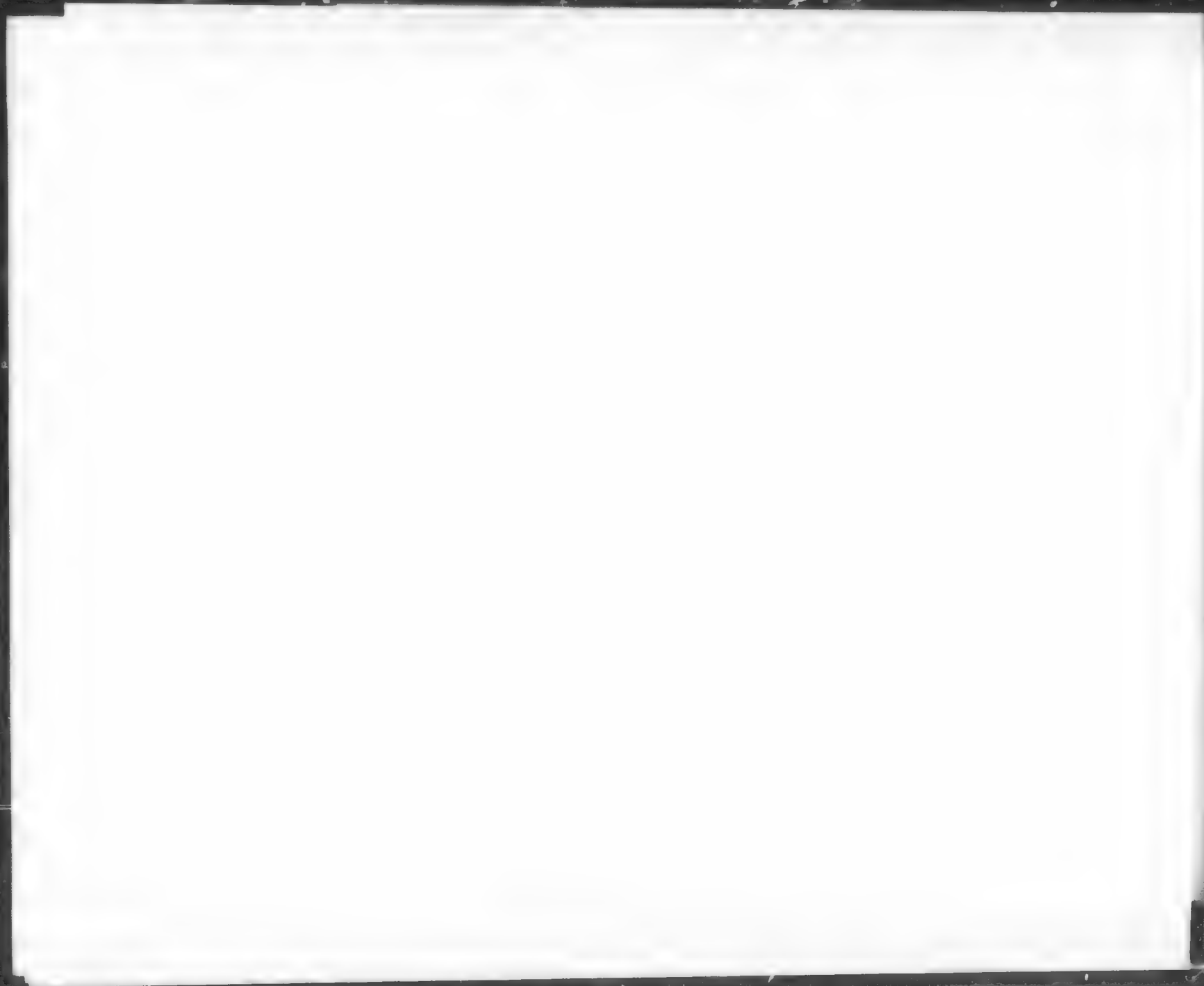


sincerity or feeling. His features were classically handsome. Light hair in curly clusters covered his brow, and a soft, silky moustache partially concealed lips framed for passion, deceit and cruelty.

We may as well say at once that Edward Villiers was a scamp; not such a low black-guard as is usually implied by the term, but with as black a heart under his glossy broad-cloth, and possessed of as selfish and sensual a soul as any imprisoned within the precincts of a city gaol. Scruples he had none; no mental operations of his were in any degree affected by conscience, although prudential, self-protective considerations supplied him with a semblance of propriety which, to the careless observer, might look like genuine honour.

With coat-tails extended before the fire, and a general make-myself-at-home sort of an air, this personage said in clear, sharp, but not unmusical tones,—

"I thank, Mrs. Clarke, that you have caught me meaning exactly. Flirting is a science, a work of art, of exquisite art. Any clown can make love, and sigh, and pant, and profess it, and all that sort of thing, absolutely *by* what he says, although almost too bodyish to say what he feels; but to flirt, that is, to flirt elegantly and artistically, *good!* that's another sort of thing. I regard flirting, Mrs. Clarke, as one of the greatest luxuries of life. I have had my romantic affairs, of course, and can appreciate the charm of the thing while it lasts, but what the deuce is going to feed a flame when the oil is gone, to keep the steam going when the fuel is burnt? Empty sentiment won't do it. *Good!* I remember the first time I spooned, and I got soft and tender in downright earnest, and had my bosom racked with alternating hopes and fears, and all that sort of thing, you know, and acted my best to charm my charmer. But, like a great fool, I didn't



stop there. I went on my knees—I professed love—I proffered my hand and heart, which were politely accepted, and—*heigh, presto!* the delusion was dispelled. A wet dish-cloth was thrown over the whole thing. I was no longer witty and gay; she no longer fascinating. We jogged along in a resigned sort of fashion for a fortnight, and then by mutual consent agreed to forget each other, and be happy. So much for love, Mrs. Clarke!”

The lady looked amused.

“So much for vapid sentiment, you mean, Mr. Villiers. It was not such love, at all events, as filled the heart of Petrarch for his Laura.”

“Not quite,” laughed the other.

Mrs. Clarke smiled somewhat contemptuously.

Villiers shrugged his shoulders.

“To revert to our original topic,” said he carelessly, “flirting is a science, and a most charming diversion too; it lends quite a

piquancy to life, quite a relish to existence: it dissipates, Mrs. Clarke, that unpleasant and irksome sense of feeling like a vegetable which I’ll be bound to say constantly attacks every sentient man. To flirt well is to pluck the rose without pricking yourself with the thorn; to quaff the wine of life without satiety; to catch the froth and sweets of Circe’s *cu*, without swallowing the dregs. For Heaven’s sake, dear Mrs. Clarke, let us flirt.”

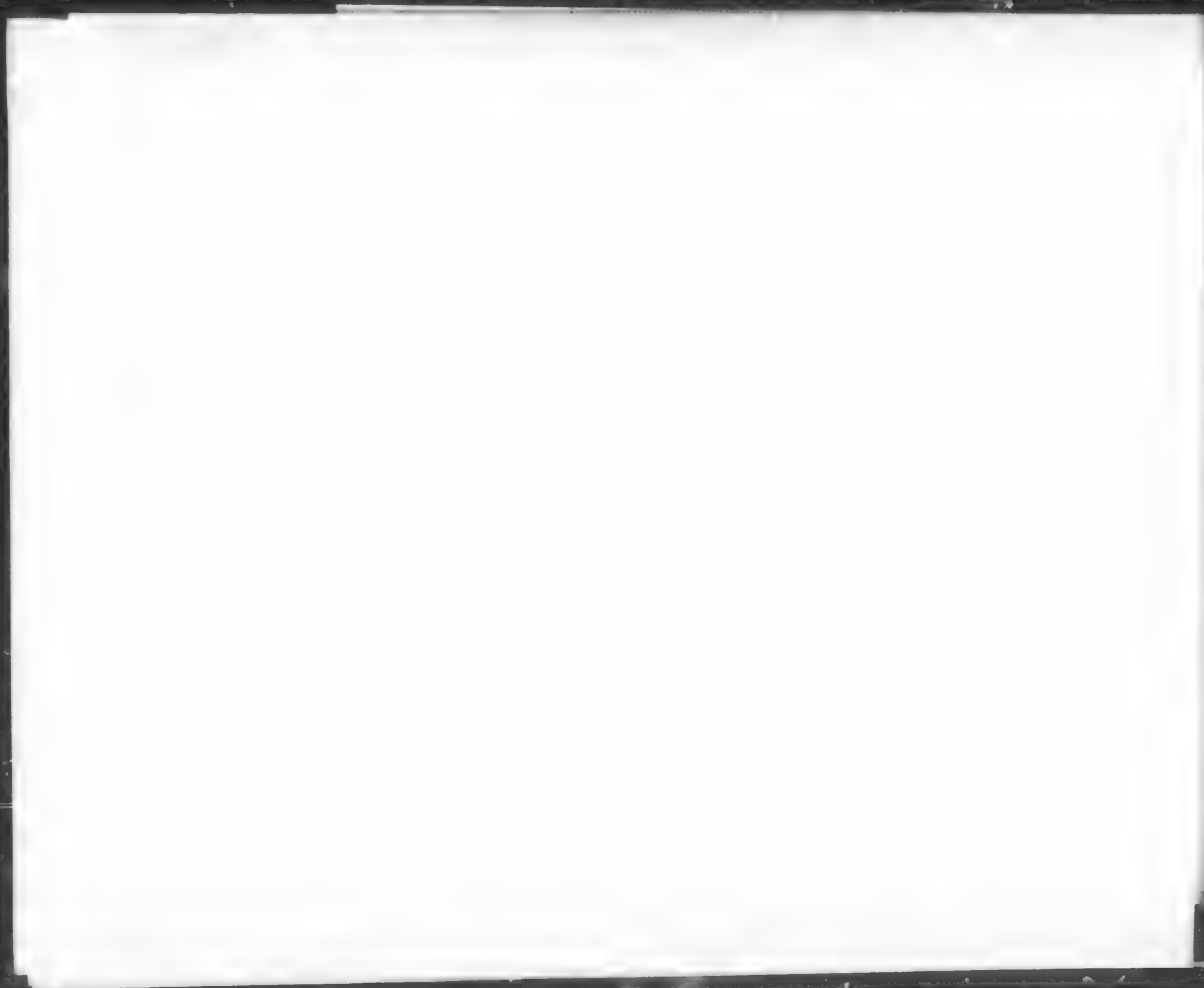
“Agreed, Mr. Villiers. But no declaration, —no scenes, mind.”

The jingle of sleigh bells on the frosty air turned the conversation.

“Here’s Florimel at last, I declare!” cried Mrs. Clarke joyously; “she is my sister, you know, Mr. Villiers, and arrived only yesterday from England.”

“I shall be charmed to make her acquaintance, and if she is at all like you—”

“You scent a flirtation, I perceive, already,



air," interposed his companion. "But be warned; I'll not allow that good girl to be corrupted. As for me, I'm an old sinner."

"And a remarkably handsome one," said Villiers, sauntering to the window; "let us see this young eaglet that you are going to take under your maternal wing."

At that moment the sleigh halted at the door. Mrs. Clarke nodded familiarly to a young girl and an old gentleman, who both got out and ascended the steps. The newcomers entered. With the elderly gentleman, her father, Preston Jones, Villiers was acquainted; but he was introduced to Florimel for the first time.

The latter was dark, and had a complexion similar to that of her sister; but with that their similarity in appearance ceased. Marion Clarke was most decidedly inclined to *embon-point*; Florimel was slender and delicate. She was ten years the junior of her sister, and wore a gentle amiability of expression

strikingly contrasting with the fiery, impetuous look which rarely deserted the countenance of Mrs. Clarke. Florimel seemed to possess the quiet, attractive beauties of the violet; her sister, the rich, voluptuous fascination of the deep-red, full-blown rose. There was, in spite of himself, a deference of manner in his address to Florimel, which Villiers was unaccustomed to pay to the generality of women. His opinions of the sex were far from exalted as a rule. Florimel formed an exception; he felt instinctively that he must judge her by a higher standard. For the first time in his life, Villiers beheld a pretty girl with whom he did not feel impelled to flirt.

There was, indeed, a galaxy of charms about Florimel that few susceptible human natures, that is of the male sort, could withstand. Her figure was faultless, her slightest action grace itself; her voice sounded like the softly-modulated cadence of a silver lute

—melodious, sweet, intoxicating. She had dove's eyes, and pearly teeth, and lips the most exquisitely formed that the eyes of man ever beheld. Her brow was pale, smooth, and intellectual-looking; her head perfect in its contour. Her hair was a very dark auburn in colour, very soft, glossy, and rich; it was caught up behind in heavy natural folds, and gave to her head quite a queenly air. There was a quiet dignity in her manner, and an open, confiding expression in her eyes, which in some peculiar, inexplicable way would make the boldest respectful, and inspire with admiration the most *blasé* gentleman of our acquaintance.

Oh, Florimel! lovely, loving, loveable Florimel! unagitated as yet by passion, untouched by sorrow; would to Heaven we could preserve thee ever thus! Alack! but the lot of humanity must be hard when even such as thou are doomed to suffer.

But let us not anticipate. No cloud as yet

had hovered on the horizon of her young life; all had been bright as the rays of the sun now streaming in through the window, and surrounding her sweet, angelic face with a halo as if of glory.

"Beautiful, entrancing, divine!" muttered Villiers involuntarily.

Florimel started, and, meeting his rapt gaze, looked upon the ground in some confusion.

Mrs. Clarke darted upon Villiers a glance dark and threatening, which he was too much preoccupied to heed.

Suddenly the sun's radiance was obscured by a passing cloud. In a moment all was dark, cold, and cheerless.

CHAPTER II.

THE JONES FAMILY.

THE gloom was short-lived ; soon the sun shone forth again in all its splendour.

The ladies, the excitement of toilet manipulation over, subsided into a subdued decorum of manner, very soft and attractive. Soon tea was announced. Mrs. Clarke presided with matronly dignity at the table, *vis-à-vis* to her father. Florimel and Villiers faced each other. Throughout the meal the latter bestowed the most delicate attention upon the fair girl. The conversation was cheerful, and, thanks to the wit of Villiers and smart repartees of Mrs. Clarke, even piquant. Mr.

Jones, when they did not get out of his depth, managed to make occasional remarks of a practical character, which were honoured with a grave attention on the part of his hearers ; and the spirits of Florimel, greatly stimulated by her recent exercise, enabled her to impart to the common stock of everyday topics a racy freshness. When the little party rose from the table they were mutually pleased with each other. Villiers was charmed with the freshness and light-hearted, unaffected gaiety of Florimel. Her *naïveté* begat in him a kindred ingenuousness and *abandon*. He found himself laughing and chattering like a boy. He exerted himself to please. His colloquial powers, trained by early and constant intercourse with the gay world, were well calculated to impress with admiration the simple, inexperienced mind of a young girl, the extent of whose travels had been limited to a fleeting glance at Switzerland, or a holiday

tour up the Rhine. Florimel listened to his fluent and witty narrations with breathless interest. She had a keen perception of the ludicrous, and hailed all his humorous sallies with thorough appreciation. All this conversational brilliancy was lost upon Mr. Jones, who had comfortably ensconced himself in an arm-chair by the fire, making an elegant ottoman do duty as a foot-rest.

"Marion," said the latter presently, "get me to-day's paper."

"I'll get it, dearest papa," interposed the younger sister affectionately; "which is it?"

"The *Indicator* to be sure," broke in Villiers, with a malicious laugh.

"No, don't get that," cried Mrs. Clarke, "papa doesn't like it."

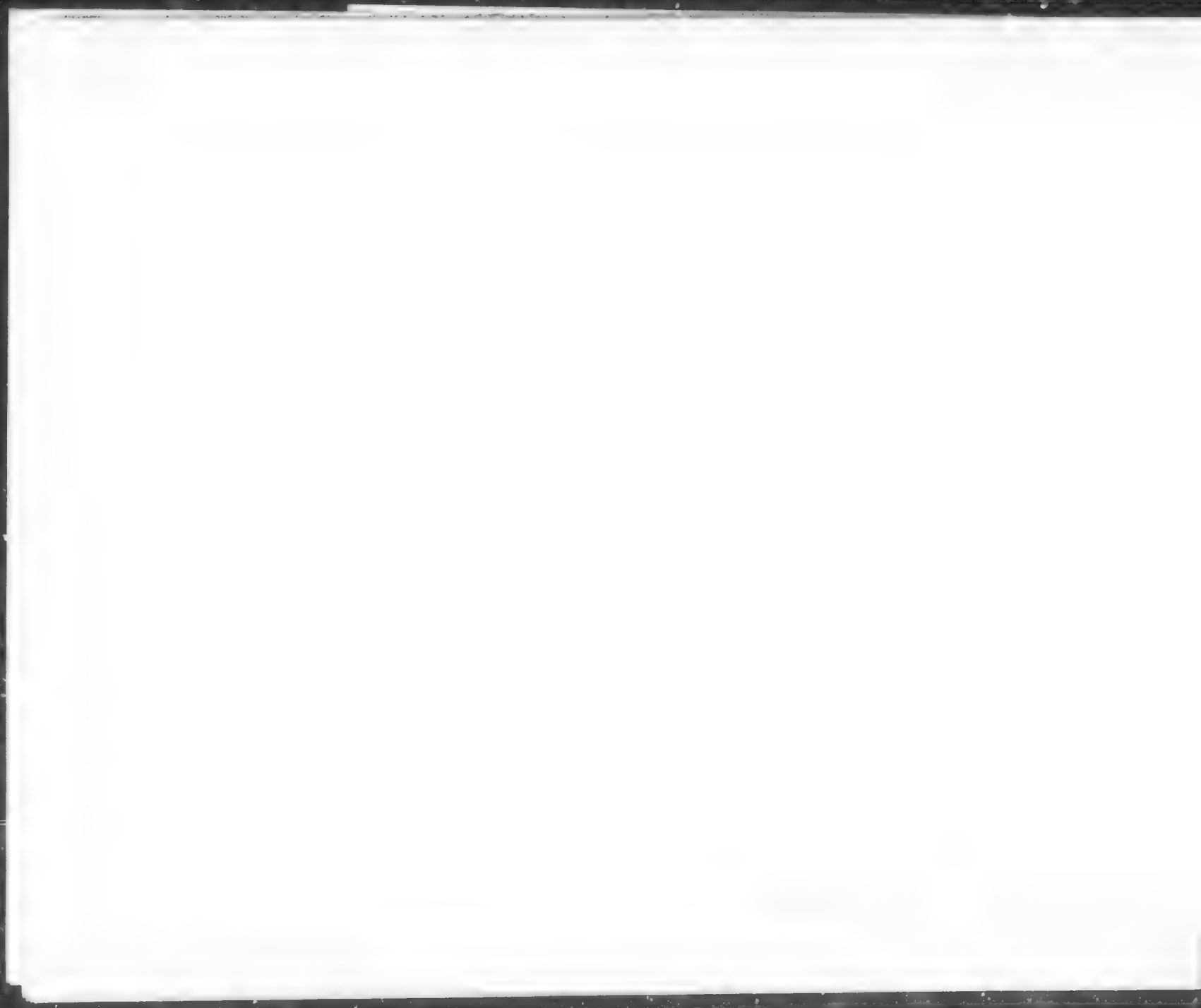
"Decidedly not," said that gentleman testily. "Such a scurrilous rag ought to be suppressed by Government. Nobody is safe from its vile attacks. Last week I actually figured in it myself. Florimel, my love, you

will find the *Coldwell Times* in my coat pocket; and get me my slippers, my dear."

His daughter performed these dutiful offices with alacrity. Her father thanked her with a kiss.

"What sort of a paper is the *Indicator*? I have not seen it. What makes you laugh so much?" demanded she of Villiers, who appeared to be getting into a state of great hilarity.

"The *Indicator*!" rejoined he, with affected rapture. "Why, it is an inestimable boon, a priceless ruby; it is the silver lining to the black cloud of ignorance and inanity with which the dull world of Coldwell is covered. You have not seen it? Ah! I forgot. Its silvery effulgence, then, must have dawned upon the benighted universe during your absence abroad. It is a masterpiece of literature, a paragon of genius, socially, morally, politically, theologically, and comically, like its editor."



"And pray who is its editor?" inquired Florimel.

"What! Is there a being in the wide world who has never heard of John Smith—that presumes to breathe this mundane atmosphere oblivious of the great John Smith—the gorilla, as he is called by some, the viper, hawk, hornet, by others; our modern Diogenes, the Newfoundland Carlyle, the misanthrope, cynic, and humorist combined? But pardon me—I forgot. You have been banished from the great centre, the mighty focus of civilization. You have been out of Coldwell, doubtless residing in the midst of the semi-barbarous nations of Europe. Brought once more within the celestial confines of aboriginal, intellectual majesty, you may now be enrolled in the foremost files of enlightenment, one of ourselves."

"I hope so," said the young girl, laughing. "But tell me, is Mr. Smith so *very* clever?"

"He is," observed Mrs. Clarke quietly, "very clever, and very handsome, and very odd."

"Who is that?" broke in Mr. Jones, looking solemnly over the top of his paper.

"Mr. Smith, dear papa."

"Smith? Ah, yes! John Smith, the barrister. A rising man, and on the road to a fortune. Florimel, my dear, keep your eye upon Smith. He will be a bird worth catching."

"But if he is so very clever," went on Florimel, "I should be afraid to speak to him, I should get so nervous."

"Oh! he is not aggressively clever," said Mrs. Clarke. "In society he is quite modest and retiring, although, I admit, rather eccentric. I like him immensely. He is really one of my pet friends."

"Yes, he is a great favourite with you ladies," said Villiers. "He preserves an exquisite expression of guileless amiability

which wins its way to the susceptible female heart at once. His insinuating address is extraordinary, you women can't withstand it. For the rest, the Gorilla is the terror of the land; swells, snobs, hypocrites, parasites, toadies, shoddies, and humbugs of every phase of humanity shun him as they would a pestilence. Ah! it is nearly ten o'clock, I must be off. I promised to meet the gentleman himself at the billiard rooms."

Villiers rose and took his departure, bidding farewell to Florimel with some *empressment*.

CHAPTER III.

A FLIRTATION.

Mrs. CLARKE accompanied her guest as far as the hall door.

"I must congratulate you upon your sister," said Villiers. "She is quite an acquisition to our dull society here. I intend to pay my *devoirs* to so much beauty quite regularly. Egad! I am between the terrors of Scylla and Charybdis; yourself on the one hand, your lovely sister on the other."

"Take care, sir. I'll not have her trifled with or contaminated by the hollow, false views of life which I know you are prone to promulgate. Mr. Villiers," added Mrs.

Clarke earnestly, "promise me that in your intercourse with her you will not seek to scatter in her pure mind the fatal seeds of a scoffing disbelief in goodness and religion."

Villiers laughed.

"What do you take me for?" cried he, highly amused.

"For what you are, sir," said his companion calmly; "a sceptic, a trifle, a—"

"A Machiavelli, a Mephistopheles, an Iago, a Beelzebub," struck in Villiers boisterously. "Thank you, Mrs. Clarke. Upon this complimentary summary of my character, I feel equal to the perpetration of any conventional enormity. I am going to kiss you. You shall play Marguerite to my Faust."

He made a pretended effort to embrace her.

She retreated a step or two, and good-humouredly catching up a sword-cane, brandished it like an Amazon.

"Ah! you men are great cowards, all of

you; big, burly brutes, with the hearts of chickens. I know you won't face this."

He did not try. "Conscience makes cowards of us all," said he.

Mrs. Clarke for a moment or two kept her posture of defence. A true woman, she knew she could not lose by such an attitude. Her fine form was displayed to the best advantage. Her right foot, firmly advanced, was not cumbered by her drapery, and exposed to view a finely-moulded ankle. Her arms were raised, her lips parted, her eyes bright with momentary excitement. It was one of those chance postures which, when they happen, should be made the most of. Mrs. Clarke was making the most of this one. Villiers gazed upon her in unaffected admiration.

"Mrs. Clarke," cried he, with real enthusiasm, "you are the finest woman I ever saw, and that, I assure you, is saying a great deal. But in sober earnest, where did you pick up

your curious notions of my moral depravity? I am actually shocked."

"I don't think that I said anything about your moral depravity, sir; but I rejoice to hear that you are shocked. Such an extraordinary phenomenon I imagined hardly possible. Perhaps I have judged you too harshly. Mr. Villiers, I feel that you understand, and, perhaps, sympathize with my anxiety for my sister, and I ask you to aid me in guarding her from the evils I dread. Avoid in your conversation with her the quicksands of worldly philosophy, and you will earn my everlasting gratitude."

Mrs. Clarke was speaking with affecting earnestness. Villiers, for a moment, was subdued into gravity. With ready tact she improved the occasion. Softly approaching him, she laid her hand lightly on his arm. Her touch thrilled him, it made his heart leap. Standing in such propinquity to him in all her mellowed beauty, with upturned,

entreating gaze, yet withal a consciousness of her irresistible charms pervading her whole expression, she seemed like some glorious statue endued by some mysterious spell with life. Few men could have looked upon her unmoved. Villiers with difficulty refrained from some unconventional demonstration. His eyes looked into hers with the burning fever of passion; and it was only by a powerful effort that he suppressed more conclusive signs of the vehemency of his emotion. The heart of Mrs. Clarke throbbed; she felt that for her it was a moment of triumph. Her eyes for an instant flashed with the fires of victory, and then melted into a look of caressing tenderness. Her hand rested on his arm; he was like steel under the power of a magnet.

"You will promise me, Mr. Villiers, won't you?" murmured the lady in low, sweet, beseeching accents.

"Upon my soul, Mrs. Clarke," cried Villiers

hotly, "at this moment I could promise you anything."

"Ah!" said the gratified woman, the faintest tincture of irony in her tone, "you are getting in love with me, aren't you, Mr. Villiers? Oh, fie! and you so sworn against scenes!"

The words probed his vanity to the quick. The spell was broken. He shook her hand from his arm, and smiled contemptuously.

"Pooh! Mrs. Clarke. Imagination flies away with you women. Your conceit runs away with your reason. When you have really counted me among your victims, I shall reserve the announcement for my own lips, but I am afraid that this delightful little piece of experimental sentimentalism must terminate in smoke, at least upon my part."

Whilst speaking he drew forth a cigar.

"Mrs. Clarke, you'll doubtless try a weed," said he, with ironical gallantry, "it will re-

move in a felicitous and impalpable manner any unpleasant impression which—"

"No thanks," broke in Mrs. Clarke, adroitly turning the tables, "I have no impressions to smoke off."

"The deuce you haven't," growled the baffled gentleman under his breath.

He lit his cigar, however, with an air of provoking coolness, and sallied forth into the street. He walked rapidly, for the air was penetrated with a keen, biting frost, and, the feeling of irritation against Mrs. Clarke having subsided, soliloquized somewhat after the following manner:—

"So my dainty beauty thinks me in love with her, does she? Love! what a meaningless word! I suppose it has got a meaning, too, other than its tame signification in the dictionary. Romancists say that it means ingenuousness, constancy, self-sacrifice. Self-sacrifice! Ha! I can picture myself practising self-sacrifice! And this woman said I

was in love with her! What's *her* opinion of it? Not unlike my own, I suspect, something identical with passion, fierce, fiery passion, ardent, short-lived, a fever of the heart, an inflammation of the brain, a bubble, a meteor, dazzling, deceptive, often fatal. I ought to know a *little* of that sort of thing. Egad! her sister is a nice sort of girl, too; so soft, so simple, so good, all sweetness, grace and innocence. Upon my soul, I've scruples of conscience about her. By the way, I wonder how poor Edith makes it out. It would be devilish awkward if she turned up when she wasn't wanted."

This last reflection seemed to occasion him some uneasiness, for he quickened his steps and gave utterance to a savage curse. He hurried along so absorbed in his thoughts that he bestowed but a careless glance at the magnificent spectacle which the heavens now presented.

The *Aurora Borealis*, a sight common in

the skies of Newfoundland, extended its brilliant coruscations in well-nigh every direction, darting hither and thither, shifting, glancing, fading, reappearing, never at rest, illuminating the night with indescribable splendour. Fitful and fleeting, it was no unfitting emblem of human passion. The sheen was glorious while it lasted. But its grandeur and evanescence were soon things of the past, to be faintly remembered and described in the days to come.

"Hallo, V.!" called a voice.

"Come in, Ned," shouted another.

Before he was aware of it, Villiers found himself at the door of the billiard-rooms.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SISTERS.

Mrs. CLARKE, in the meantime, had rejoined her father and sister, greatly elated by the sparks of sentiment which her address and personal charms had elicited from the ordinarily impassible Villier. Soon father and daughters separated for the night, the former to seek instant repose and dream of profitable speculations, the latter to spend an hour or two in confidential chit-chat in Mrs. Clarke's boudoir.

"Oh, Marica, do come—quick! Is it not beautiful?"

The speaker had peeped through the blinds,

and now held them drawn aside, giving to view the final glories of the scene described in the last chapter.

"It is, indeed," rejoined her sister; "they are the Northern Lights. See how faint the quivering rays are getting, dying, dying away so gradually, waxing more and more feeble and indistinct, until all is gloom and shadow and Egyptian night. It is like everything else in the world, Florimel. There is a glitter and brilliance for a time, and then death, nothingness, despair. I am quite melancholy—am I not, dearest? Alas! I have deep cause for melancholy. Husband and child gone—dead—out of sight—lost to me. Sometimes, Florimel, my loneliness is terrible. You will comfort me when I get low-spirited like this, won't you, dearest?"

Mrs. Clarke had approached her sister, and now stood affectionately embracing her. Florimel looked up in tearful sympathy, and pressed her to her heart.

"Thanks, dearest; I know you love me. All is not a blank. Some sparks of hope and love are still left. And, look, as if in encouragement, the Northern Lights are brightening again. How splendid!"

They lingered for some time at the window, the two sisters, their hearts holding silent, sacred communion together. There are bonds in nature too deep for words; and, without speaking, each felt the occult strength and ineffable sweetness of sympathy.

Drawing the curtains—for the gorgeous phenomenon in the heavens had waned and vanished—they seated themselves before the fire, Mrs. Clarke in an arm-chair, and Florimel on a footstool at her feet. The latter looked up lovingly. Mrs. Clarke stroked her hair, smiling affectionately but sadly.

"You think me very dull to-night, my darling. I am often this way. You must take no notice of it. It does not follow that because I am sad I am unhappy. Memories,

dear Florimel, rush upon us at times and overpower us; nor do I think it wrong to indulge them. The heart knoweth its own bitterness, and why should one shrink from such knowledge? Often reflection upon it affords balm to the soul. I am not sorry that I have suffered; but I should be sorry that you should suffer, my darling; so do not hesitate to rally me as often as you like. There, I am quite cheerful again. Do you know what so amused me to-night? I was thinking of Mr. Villiers. It was a case of bitter bit. Ha! ha! I was delighted. Mr. Villiers, my dear, is a very vain man, and deserves a little humiliation now and then. He thinks, Florimel, that women are like pianos, always standing open and ready to be played upon whenever the man's fingers itch for such a pastime. Do not let him make a piano of you, Florimel; he will try to, though, like he does of every woman. To be forewarned is to be forearmed, so take care."

"I hardly understand you, dear Marion. Is he not a good man and a gentleman?"

"A gentleman, yes, my dear. But a good man—no. 'A gentleman' is a term so wonderfully elastic in its signification that it will embrace even Edward Villiers. 'A good man' is a title of much narrower range, and most certainly excludes black sheep of his description."

"Then he is a bad man," said Florimel bluntly.

"Well, I suppose so; but the world would not call him bad. He is a little *fast* in the world's eye, that is all. As long as one does not transgress the code of conventional propriety in any glaring way, the world does not hold one bad. He is vain, heartless, and unscrupulous; but these are just the qualifications suited to advancement in life, and invariably command tacit respect."

"I am sure I thought him quite a genius,"

said Florimel, smiling, "as good as he was clever and agreeable."

"When it suits him, he can be an angel of light, like all the rest of his tribe. Ah! I have not known men of his stamp for nothing! Such creatures, Florimel, are lost to every pure feeling or noble impulse. They make gods of themselves, and render everything subservient to self-gratification. My blood boils sometimes to think of how women become first the toys and then the slaves of vampires like these. They snare the affections of a woman with their false smiles and honeyed words, and purr like cats when you stroke them, but their claws are of steel and their teeth iron. They will play with their poor little mouse until they are tired of it, and then tear your heart out and devour you."

"Are all men like Mr. Villiers?" said Florimel, anxiously.

"Yes, my dear, nearly all of them. Papa is different, and my poor husband was, and

one or two others, perhaps, but all the rest are the same. I hate them."

"How about Mr. Smith? Is he wicked too?"

"No; Mr. Smith is an exception. I like him. But don't talk to me of men, dear Florimel, I have *you* to love now."

Florimel rose up quickly and threw her arms around her sister's neck.

"And I love *you*!" cried she, "I love you so much. I will never love these men, never. You have my whole heart."

"Hush!" said the other solemnly, "you know not what you say. I thought once to escape the whirlpool, but was sucked into it helplessly. There is Fate in these things—stern, inexorable Fate! No, Florimel, I thank you for your love, my darling, my child, my sister; but do not deceive yourself. Harrowing passion will overtake you, sooner or later, just like it did me. Then, while the fever lasts, I shall be as nothing to you, com-

paratively speaking, the great love of your soul for its idol swallowing up all lesser likings."

"But *you* are my lover, my idol," said the fair girl, persistently, "and all my love shall be lavished on you alone."

Mrs. Clarke again stroked the hair of her sister softly and tenderly, with a look in which seemed blended infinite sweetness and pity.

"Dearest Florimel, you need not assure me of your affection; I know it. But you have not experience enough to enable you to pronounce absolutely upon this question. Your heart is young and untried; and this very readiness which you manifest to bestow on me all the rich treasures of its love, is already a sufficient index that the great ordeal of your woman's life has begun. Your heart is groping blindly for its idol even now. Your trial must come, dear Florimel, *must* come. These things : : decreed. Face the inexor-

able fact bravely and calmly, and not, like I did, with impulsive, unthinking hardihood."

Florimel did not answer, but gazed into the fire, convulsively pressing her sister's hand. The words had sunk into her soul like a prophecy, and she pondered them over and over for many a long day and night. She felt in some indefinable way that they were true, yet wished not to realize the truth feeling the vague dread that such truth might imperil her happiness rather than promote it; why, she knew not.

Mrs. Clarke too fell into a contemplative mood, and was silent. Shortly afterwards they retired to rest, Florimel first going to the window and taking a final look-out into the night. There was nothing to be seen but thick, murky darkness. She felt, with a shudder, that the darkness was not unlike the veil of her future life, impenetrable to her vision.

CHAPTER V.

DIDEROT'S ROOMS.

THE billiard-rooms which Villiers entered in quest of John Smith were contained in an extensive wooden building, owned by a garrulous Frenchman named Pierre Diderot. The whole structure was detached from neighbouring houses, and wore an air of uncommon self-assertion like its master. It was one of those buildings impossible to pass without observation. The exterior, although affecting no pretensions to grandeur, nevertheless seemed endued with a sort of grave dignity which was certain to inspire a stranger with respect and curiosity. The entrance to it was

on a large scale, and within was embellished with stuffed specimens of natural history, birds, beasts, and reptiles, ranged on shelves on either side of the broad staircase leading to the billiard-rooms. A pair of bronze lions flanked the entrance to this miniature museum. The doors were gorgeously illuminated with coloured glass, variegated with cuts of flowers, flourishes, and the like; whilst in the centre, announcing the title of ownership in large and unmistakable characters, one read the words *DIDEROT'S ROOMS*.

Villiers, not finding Smith in the billiard-rooms, penetrated to the restaurant beneath. It was a long, well-lighted, handsomely-furnished apartment, with mirrors adorning the walls, and bouquets of artificial flowers standing upon each of the small white marble tables regularly placed along both sides of the room, leaving a broad passage in the centre. Several persons were seated; others were standing and discussing bills of fare, unde-

cided upon what they should sup or dine. For the most part these persons were clerks, who, having amused themselves in the rooms above, sought rest and refreshment at more useful tables, previous to their adjournment to the bar and departure for home or such places of enjoyment as their fancy might dictate. Among them Villiers observed a short, smartly-dressed young fellow, with a frank, open look on his countenance, and a prepossessing air. Villiers beckoned to him. The young man approached, bowing deferentially. Villiers inquired if he had seen aught of Mr. Smith.

"I saw him with M. Diderot some twenty minutes ago, but not since, sir. I'll see if he is at the bar."

"Ah, do! And stay, Gilner, if you find him, say that I will join him almost immediately."

Gilner's search was unsuccessful. Villiers shrugged his shoulders, and, closely followed

by the young man, made his way to the bar, for the double purpose of concluding the day's exertions with a "night-cap," and indulging in a little flirtation with Sally Cook, decidedly the Hebe of the establishment, and the presiding goddess of the Temple of Bacchus in Diderot's rooms.

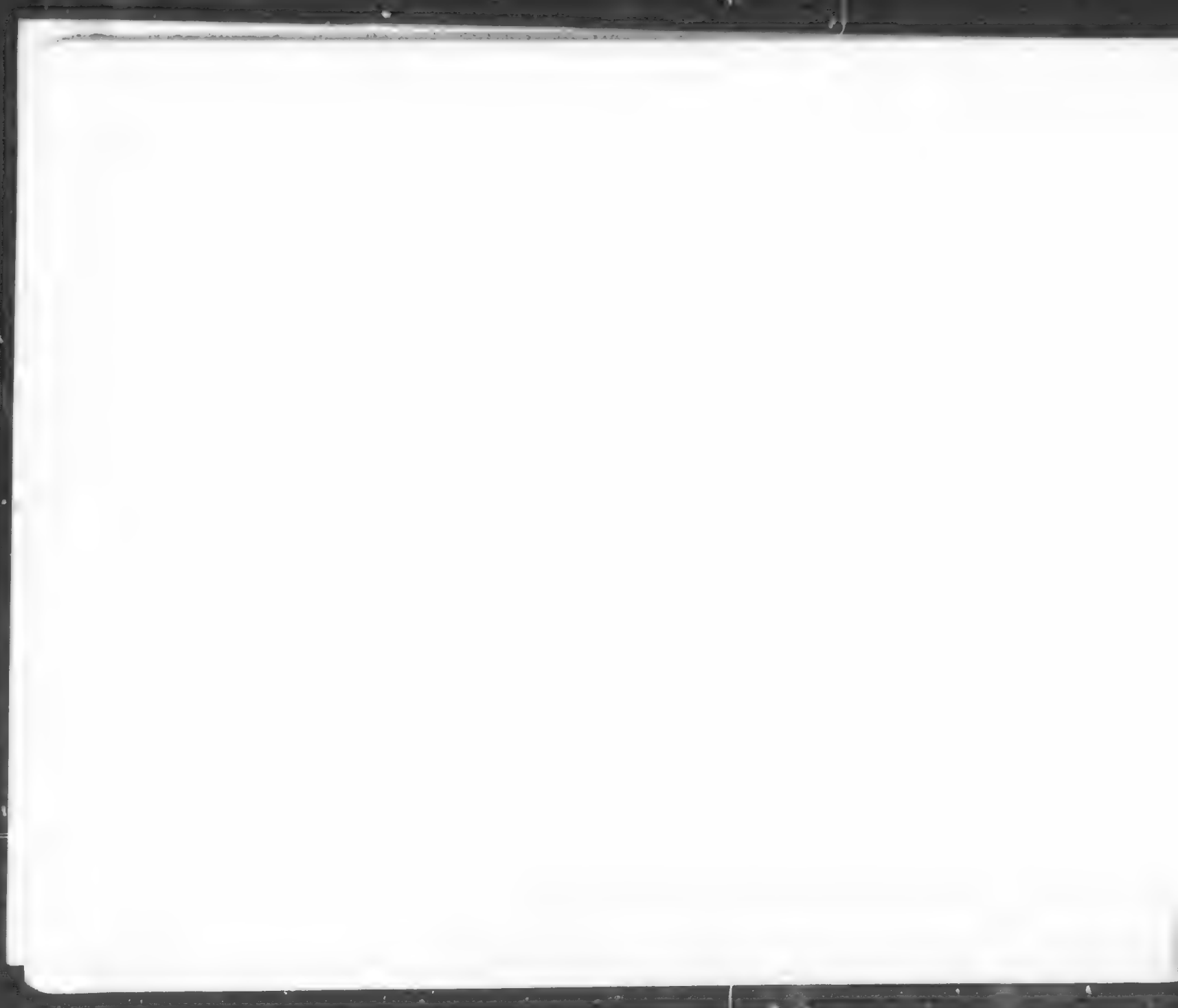
Sally Cook was a blue-eyed, yellow-haired, ruddy-cheeked, buxom damsel, *petite*, saucy and independent, the toast of all the frequenters of the rooms, and the wife that was to be of Thomas Gilner, at least such was the impression which that young gentleman fondly cherished in the secret depths of his heart, although to disinterested spectators of her conduct, her favours seemed more impartially distributed. But the happy Gilner held a pledge of her constancy next to the inner lining of his waistcoat, in the shape of a lock of her golden hair. Moreover, their vows had been sealed with mutual kisses, such heavenly kisses! kisses delivered amidst

dulcet cooings and billings, and such-like soft nonsense as only those who revel in the intoxicating bliss of love-making on the sunny side of five-and-twenty know anything about. Every night did Mr. Gilner wait patiently, or rather impatiently, for the closing of the bar to accompany his pretty little sweetheart to her home, where, on the door-step in the dark, whilst his ring was being answered, they had more kisses of course.

On the present occasion, to the irritation of Gilner, Villiers seemed ambitious of an interchange of such amorous civilities with the young girl. He ventured upon a few preliminary familiarities, and, in spite of her sharp, almost rude rebuffs, persisted in his impertinence. Cosing what he deemed an opportunity ~~made~~, he seized her arm and drew her towards him, notwithstanding her vigorous resistance.

"Leave go, Mr. Villiers, or I'll scream!"

Villiers was laughing and Gilner grinding



his teeth, almost enraged enough to rush to her rescue, when a calm, steady voice sounded behind them :

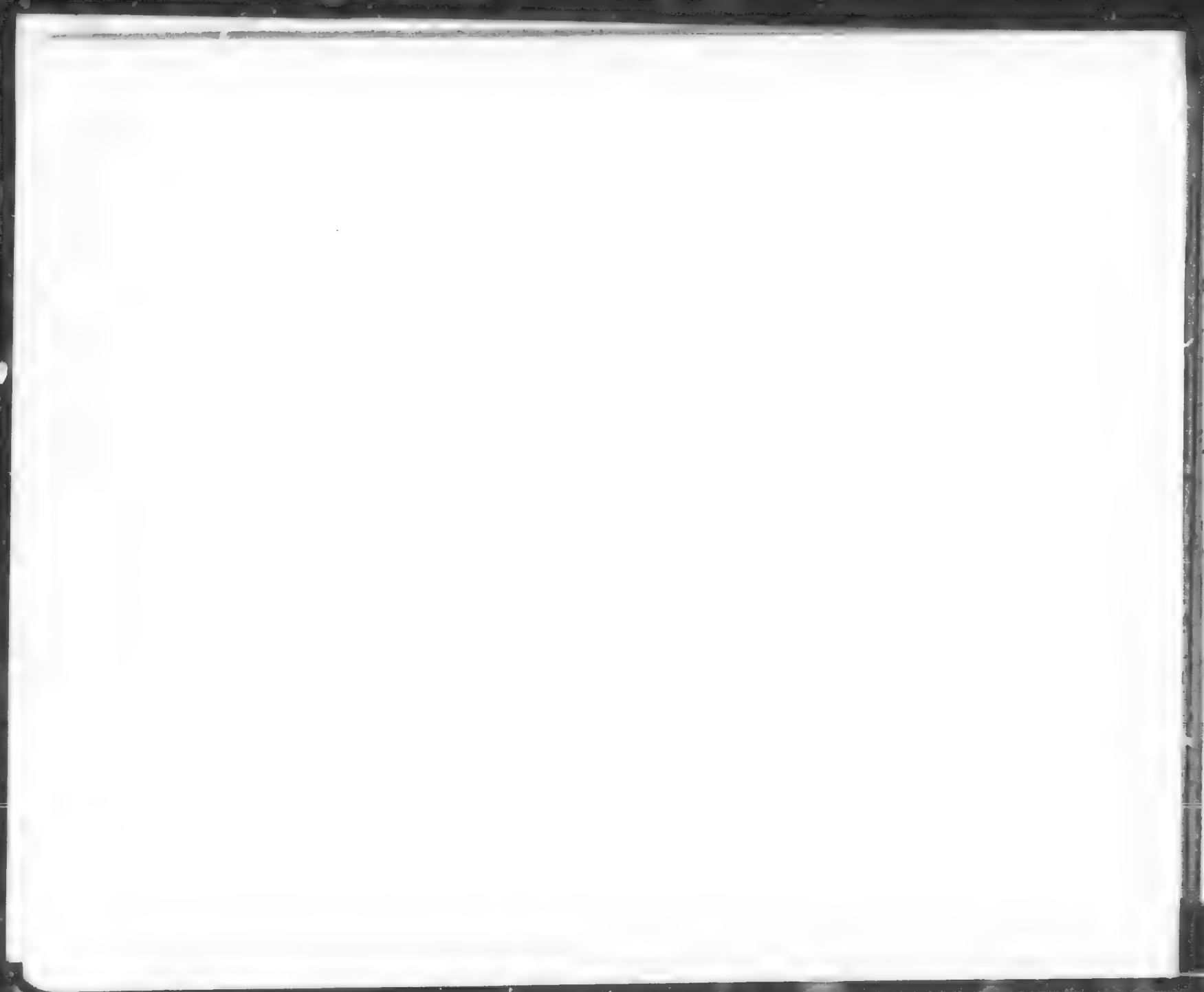
"Unhand that girl, sir!"

Startled by the abruptness and menace in the tone, Villiers released her.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GORILLA.

WHEN Villiers turned he confronted a man with a face at that time remarkable for nothing but imperturbable calmness. It was a long, thin face, hairless and colourless. The eyes were like the face, void of expression, but very clear and searching; in colour they were a light grey. It was extremely difficult to fathom their expression. Although seeking to penetrate the minds of others, they themselves made little or no tell-tale revelations of his own secret thoughts and designs. His chin was large and sternly furrowed; his mouth compressed and lips full, the upper

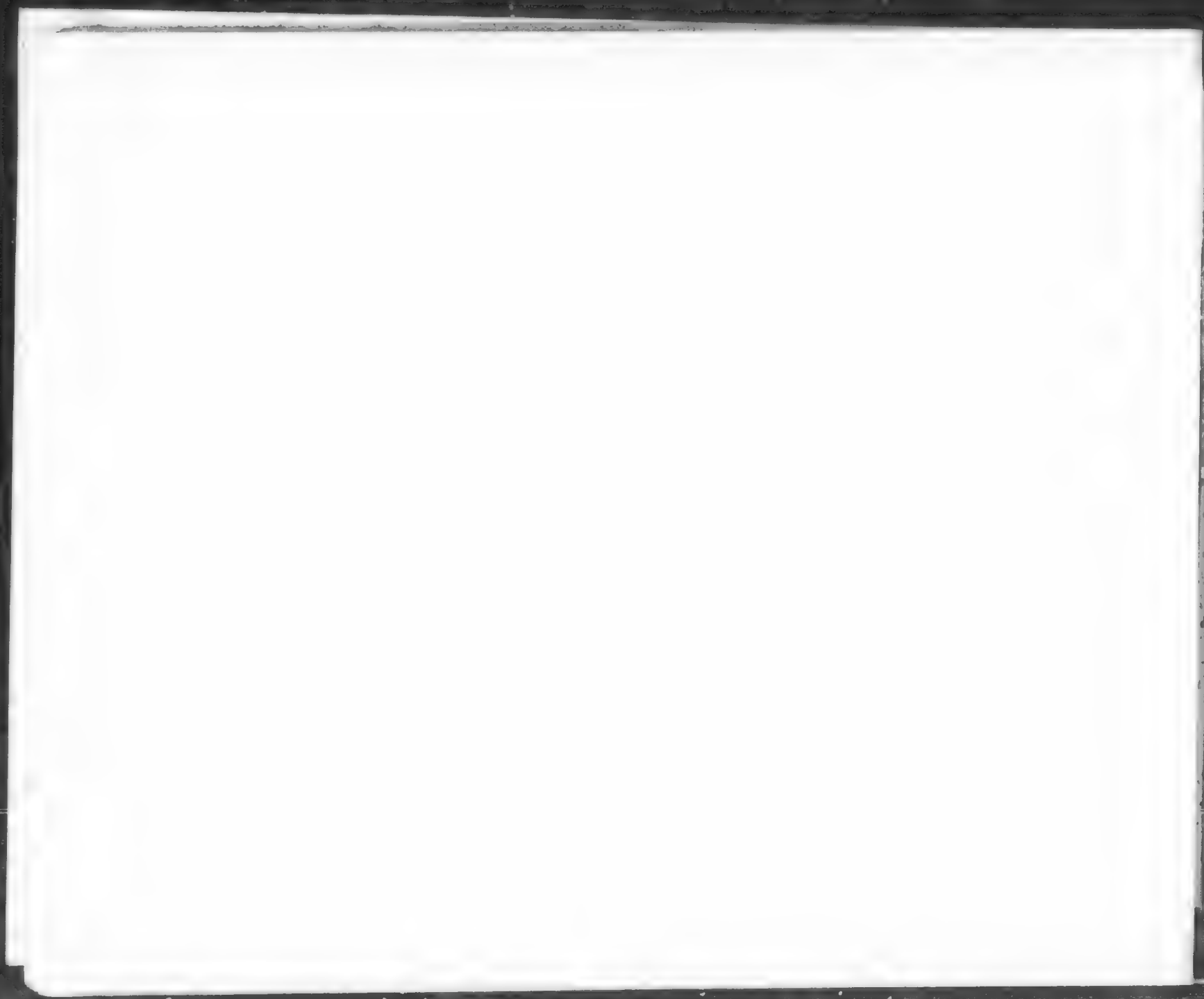


one considerably projecting and giving to his countenance a caste of Roman-like determination. He had a high, pale forehead, with contracted wrinkles immediately above and between the eyes, and crowned with light yellow hair, closely cut and carelessly dressed.

On the whole it was a very remarkable face; intellectual and passionate, one would say at the first careless glance; a face of a high type of poetical development; a face, perhaps, that some great and earnest genius might possess, intent even to fanaticism on a crusade against folly and error. Yet on a second survey this impression would be corrected. Something was wanting to vivify it into earnestness. There was an air never altogether absent from it of gloom, of despondency, of utter indifference to the affairs of life, as if the possessor had made some superhuman effort to probe the mystery and utility of his existence and given it up as a bad bargain. And in this pervading air of sadness, half-melancholy,

half-despair, lay the key-stone of his character.

John Smith had been from his earliest years a profound thinker and self-analyst; unconsciously to himself, he was a born philosopher, so constituted from the peculiar combination of those faculties which in such rare instances go to make up the metaphysician. He was a nervous man, and a man of keen sensibilities, of extended sympathies, as well as of profound reflection, a man thoughtfully alive to every event occurring in that internal and external world, which, centring in himself, embraced every object perceptible to his eye or to his mind. For him the mighty problem of existence of animal and vegetable life, of sentient matter, developed to its extreme limit in the intellect, in the soul of man, presented itself with grave and solemn import. But the all-absorbing question, while it elevated his soul into a higher stratum of intelligence than that affected by purely mundane



philosophers, at the same time fretted and vexed his understanding. Hence upon his brow there ever dwelt a perplexed, dissatisfied look, which never failed to kindle interest in the beholder. With the softer sex this interest, stimulated by the profundity of his observations, and the supreme self-possession of his manner, would deepen into sentiment and high regard, thus paving the way for more powerful emotions.

Such was the man known amongst his little circle as the Gorilla, and greatly revered and feared for his satirical powers and keen Timon-like love of invective.

We leave him with Villiers for the present, and busy ourselves with some minor figures on the stage.

CHAPTER VII.

ON THE DOOR-STEP.

THE clock was striking eleven, and the worthy Pierre Diderot was announcing the fact with all the force of his stentorian voice. The rooms were invariably emptied about this time of the night, and the doors shut, the local regulations in regard to such houses of entertainment being of the most stringent character. The crowd issuing from the billiard-rooms, mingling with the crowd leaving the restaurant and bar-room, usually made a large concourse in that quarter of the town, and a very noisy one. The pleasure-seekers, excited by stimulants, frequently

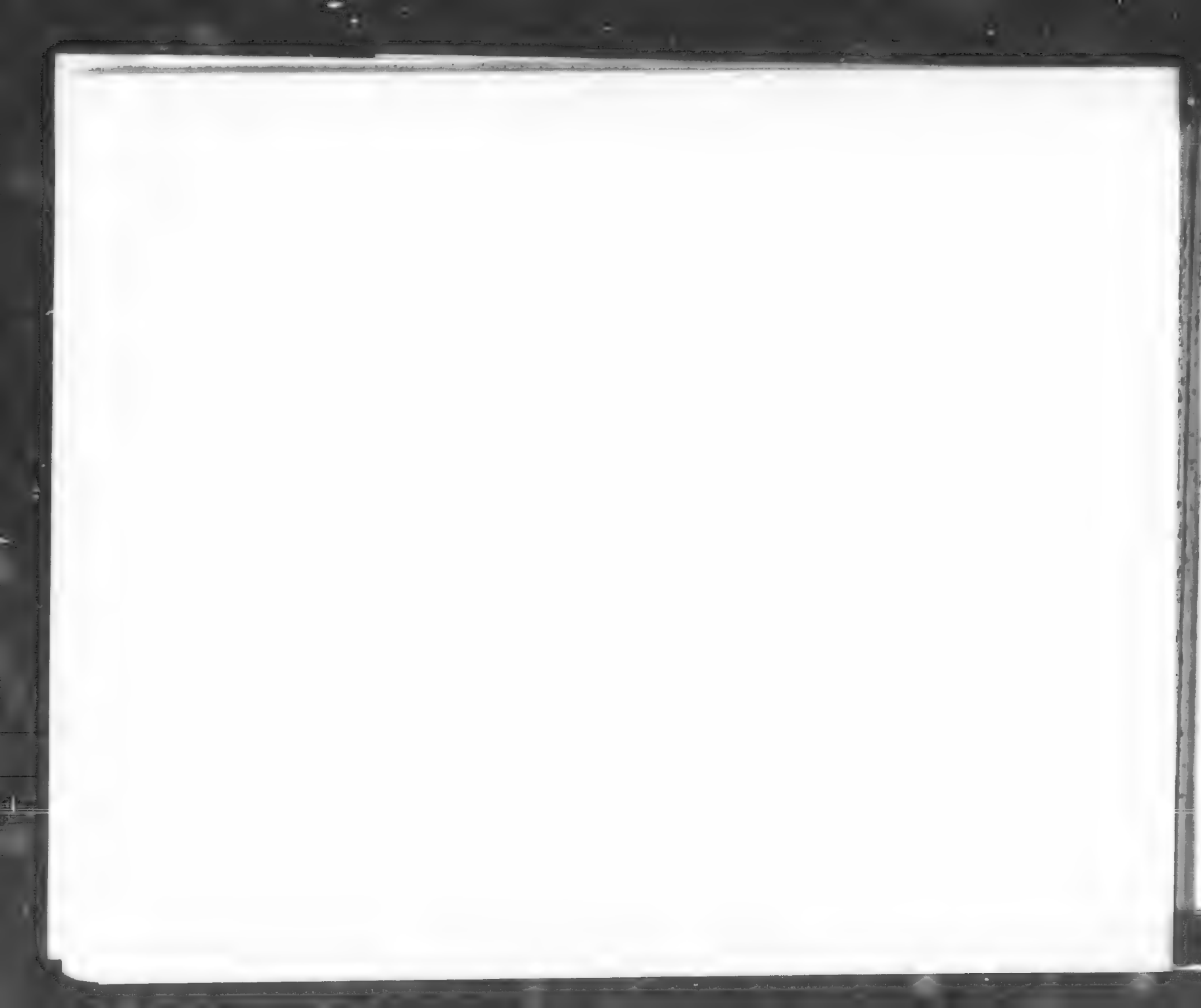
created no small uproar; some singing, some shouting, some resuming, with invigorated energy, arguments in the open air, which had been more tranquilly inaugurated at some of the snug little tables over pots of beer.

Sally Cook, who resided in lodgings remote from the scene of her daily labours, could never have wended her way alone through such a mixed and gay assemblage without molestation. She found the escort of Thomas Gilner upon such occasions invaluable. Previous to the amorous attentions of that gentleman, the pretty little damsel had been obliged either to run the gauntlet of the young bloods, ripe for any impertinence or liberty, or submit to the irksome alternative of waiting in the bar until the objects of her dislike had taken their tardy departure.

It was on one of these occasions that Thomas Gilner, an ingenious, bashful young fellow, aged three-and-twenty, and up to that time unskilled in affairs of the heart, being as

innocent as a new-born babe of the wiles of the sex, had, greatly to his own astonishment, screwed his courage up to sticking-point, and actually proposed for her hand. But perhaps Sally was not so much astonished. She had kept count of the mugs of porter he had disposed of in the course of the evening, and consequently made allowances for the inclination he would naturally feel to *support her* for life. Moreover, Sally, a maiden of some judgment and tact, had foreseen the propriety and advantage of possessing a male protector in her nightly walks home, and had with this object encouraged the attentions of her credulous lover to such an alarming extent, that the surprise on her part would have been shown on his not proposing for that soft, white little hand, which she had so often permitted to linger in his own, and with which she had so often returned the fond pressure of his.

Ah, Sally! pretty little deceiver, sly little



minx, cruel, manœuvring, clever little beauty, it is very delicious to plot thus for your own convenience and amusement, but in a game of love strange pranks are played; it is a recreation highly dangerous to tamper with the trump cards, hearts being so hard to keep always in one's own hands. Cupid, shuffling the pack with his quick, pitiless fingers, has dealt to you Gilner's heart, but yours? ah! to whom has he dealt yours? You know that Gilner does not possess it. Already you are beginning to be conscious that it is in the hands of another player.

She looked like a little fairy as she glided here and there, marshalling into some sort of order the glasses and decanters now being deserted by the bacchanalian crew, or, to vary the simile, what with the blazing lights of the bar-room, and the artificial flowers gaudily ornamenting the counter, she appeared, as she flitted about, like a butterfly, and as beautiful as the lyrically-famed Polly

Perkins. Gilner gazed upon her in delight. This bewitching damsel was his first love. Ah! how expressive of his emotions are the words "first love"! What devotion of soul they suggest! What entrancement of the faculties! What ecstasy, what celestial rapture and—what self-delusion! But it was a glorious self-delusion, worth the penalty of mental anguish which he was destined to suffer, and was in all his future retrospects to be the halcyon period around which would cluster the "bitter-sweet" memories of his life.

But he did not content himself with idly gazing on her beauties. He assisted her in the final arrangement of the bibulous paraphernalia, and helped her to put on her cloak. These attentions were performed with reverential awe, especially the adjustment of the cloak over her plump little shoulders. No Hindoo worshipper could wait upon his idol with more sacred devotion than did this young

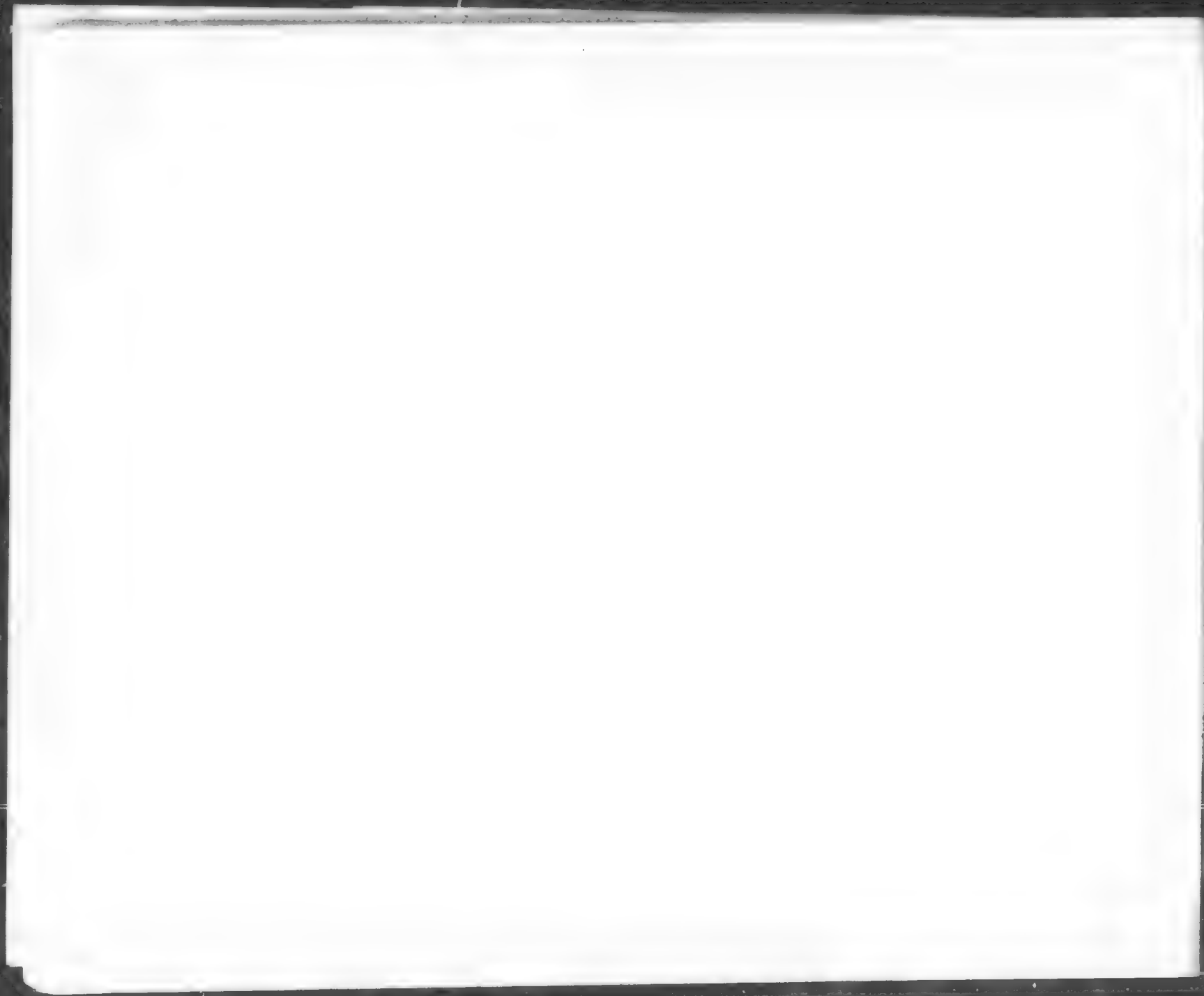
lover attend upon his mistress. He felt more than rewarded by the lively glance of her bright blue eyes, which eyes he could rarely look into without a flutter at his heart and a thrill of admiration. Nor was Thomas Gilner the first man whom the charms of a pretty face has bewildered. Ah! these deceitful Eves, how they beguile us! How is it that men ever extolling the staid, sober graces and virtues of plainer women, will recklessly at the sight of a pretty girl cast their all upon a die, or at least fancy that they do? These anomalies mock our reason, just like the love-fever of young Gilner mocked his.

When the cloak was adjusted, Sally drew the hood over her head, so that all the visible charms of her person were concentrated in the aperture through which peeped a face round, fair, and as freshly coloured as a peach. She did not forget to show her teeth and smiles whilst engaged in her hasty toilet, and used her blue eyes bewitchingly. When her

toilet was completed she gave a low laugh, very soft and musical, that won its way right into the secret depths of her lover's heart and made him drunk with joy. Oh! she was a perfect Lamia this!

"Now, sir, I am at your service."

Gilner sprang to her side and offered his arm. She took it quickly and coquettishly, pressing it tightly with her nervous, strong little fingers. Buttoning up his coat closely, for the night was cold, Gilner started off for the *dulce domum* of Sally, that seraphic little creature hanging on his arm. He took short, brisk paces, accommodating his step to hers. They passed quickly the noisy groups of revellers yet hovering around the rooms, and responded curtly to the cheerful "good-nights" with which they were greeted. Shortly after passing the last of these groups, Gilner caught the sound of his name mentioned inquiringly. He lost the rest of the sentence in the distance. But the answer,



uttered in a coarse, loud voice, by a man evidently in a state of semi-intoxication, struck upon his ears with cruel, cutting distinctness:

"Bah! she will never marry him."

Such were the words.

Sally, as they fell upon Gilner's ear, could feel his frame quiver. He had been laughing and talking gay nonsense when he heard them, rejoicing in the thought that he had the girl of his heart all to himself for one little, brief half-hour. Now he checked himself, dropping into sullen taciturnity. He felt as if some enemy had lodged in his bosom a poisoned arrow, as if some scorpion had stung him. He walked on in stolid silence for some minutes, turning over and over in his mind the harsh, bitter words. He could not get past them, and exercise his faculties upon them in a logical process; he could only keep turning them over and over with a dull, heavy feeling tugging at his heart, and weighing him down.

"What's the matter, Tom?" said the girl presently, in a voice very sweet and clear, but lacking that rich, indescribable power to soothe, which true love, and true love only, can impart to its tones.

"Nothing, Sal," said he, "I was only thinking, that's all."

"Thinking? A penny for your thoughts. Come, out with them. I know. You are thinking about your pipe. You forgot to light it."

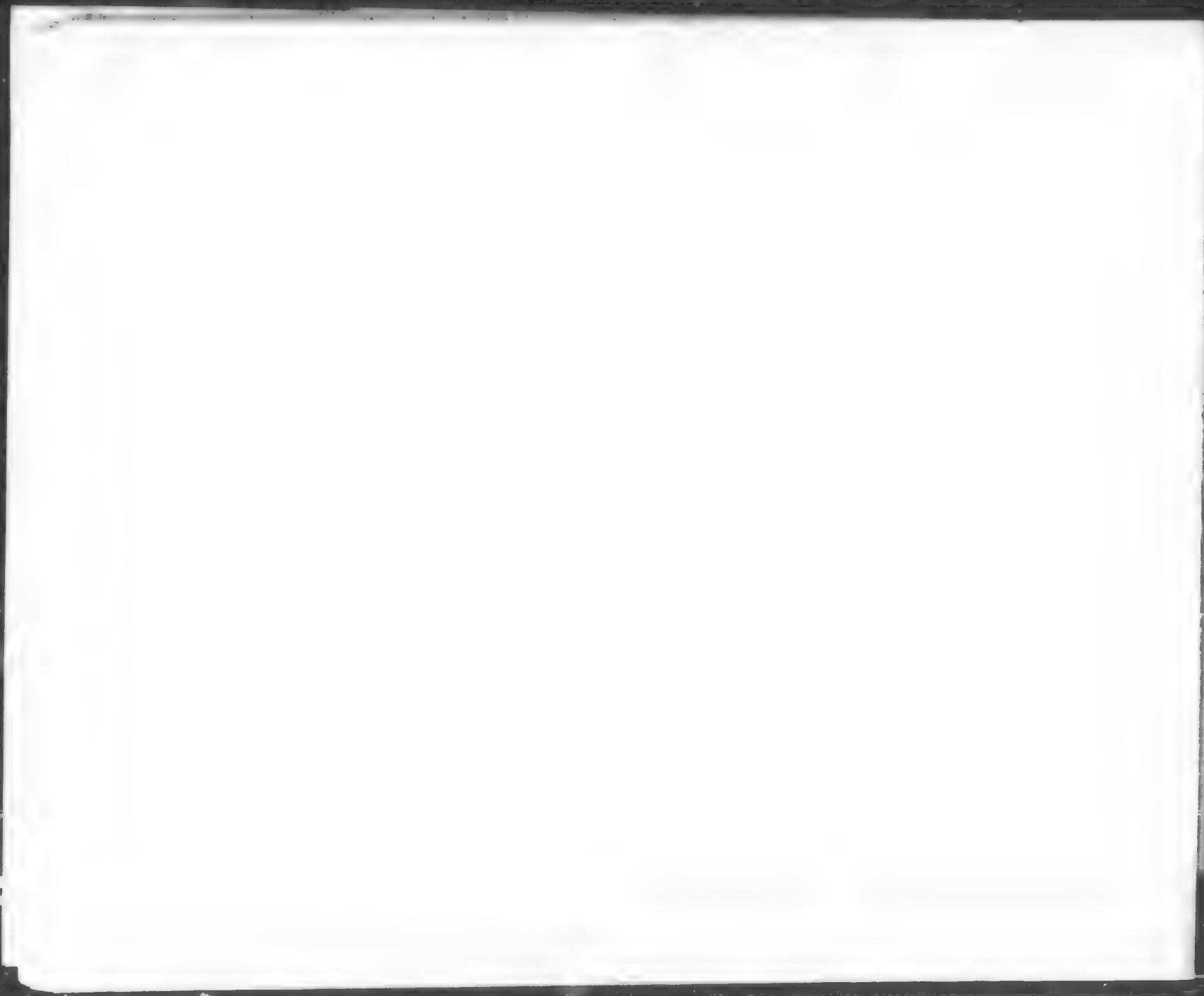
"No, Sal, it isn't the pipe. Curse the pipe. It's something that almost chokes me."

"What?" said the girl, looking up.

He bent down until his face almost touched hers.

"You know, Sal, well enough,—the man we last passed."

"Oh, Tom! look up at the Northern Lights, ain't they pretty?" answered she, evasively.



"Did you hear what that man said?" reiterated he, hoarsely.

"I did. What of it?"

"Was it true, Sal, was it true? Tell me, as you value my peace of mind and your own, was it true?"

He looked into her eyes as he spoke thus yearningly, thirsting to know the worst, if the worst was to be told, determined to search in them for the truth of her soul, if that truth should be belied by her words.

She hardly liked this. Courtied, flattered as she had been by handsomer and richer men than Gilner, her haughty little spirit rebelled at the peremptory tone which the intenseness of his passion had led him to adopt. In addition to this, Sally, like most pretty girls, had a natural love of teasing.

"What would you give to know the peace-box?" cried she, throwing back her pretty little head jauntily.

"Sal," said the young fellow, solemnly, "one of us will regret this."

"Will they? It won't be your humble servant, then."

Gilner groaned, and kept silence.

They were approaching the residence of Mr. Preston Jones, which was directly in her route home.

"See Tom!" cried the girl gaily, as if nothing had been said to vex him, "they are up at Mr. Jones's still, I do declare! How late they are to-night, and usually they retire so early! It must be on account of Miss Jones. Perhaps they have been giving a party in honour of her return from England. I do so long to see her! Have you seen her, Tom? They say that she is so pretty! and such a pretty name too, Florimel! it sounds sweet, doesn't it? sweeter than Sally. Ah! Tom, I expect you will be jilting me one of these days, and falling in love with her. And she is so rich too. Ah, me! if I



only had money, what beaux I *would* have!"

She pressed his arm tenderly.

But Gilner made no reply to her light banter. Dullard as he was in knowledge of women, he nevertheless intuitively divined that her object was to lead him from his point. He did not break the silence until they stood on her own door-step. Then he turned upon her with an air of resolution:

"Sal, things are come to a crisis. I can no longer bear this suspense; it is wearing me out. You do not treat me as you ought. I know that I am jealous. But even if I was not, your evasion of the subject whenever I speak of marriage is enough to make me doubt you. For God's sake, Sal, speak out! don't equivocate. Do you really love me?"

He awaited her reply with a throbbing heart and compressed lip. There is something in the iron will of a man before which the nervous force of a woman's resolution

quails. As she looked up into Gilner's determined features, marking the stern lines about his mouth, and the fixed, ruthless expression of his eyes, she felt this something, with a timid flutter about her heart that made her press her hand tightly on her bosom. Her acute perceptions at the same time steadily realized the full importance of the situation, and she quickly decided to deceive her lover a little longer; so serviceable an adorer was to be retained at all hazards. Coming to this conclusion, she could not avoid regarding him with an icy gaze, as if calculating the exact value of his services, and what she could afford to pay for them. The poor fellow winced under her cruel stare.

"Don't look like that, Sal, I cannot bear it, so help me God, I cannot bear it!"

It may be that the poignancy of his distress touched her.

"Tom," cried she, softly, putting her little arms lovingly around his neck, "you are a



queer fellow, ain't you? and I'm a queer girl."

"Oh, Sal, spare me this frivolity! Do you love me? is all I ask."

"You know I do, Tom!"

His heart stood still for a single instant, and then his eyes flashed fire.

He hurled her from him violently.

"It's a lie, a wicked lie, you know it is!"

But she embraced him again, with an eager clasp. Her game must be played out.

"I do love you, Tom, you know I do."

"Then God forgive me if you speak falsely!" he murmured, yielding helplessly to her syren spells, and raining upon her eyes, cheeks, and lips a thousand burning kisses.

"Good night, Sal; God bless you!"

And he left her, his soul overwhelmed with emotion.

"True as steel, true as steel," muttered he delightedly.

As he was speaking, the Aurora Borealis in its dying glory flared up into the heavens with a wild, fitful flash; it quivered for an instant, and was gone.



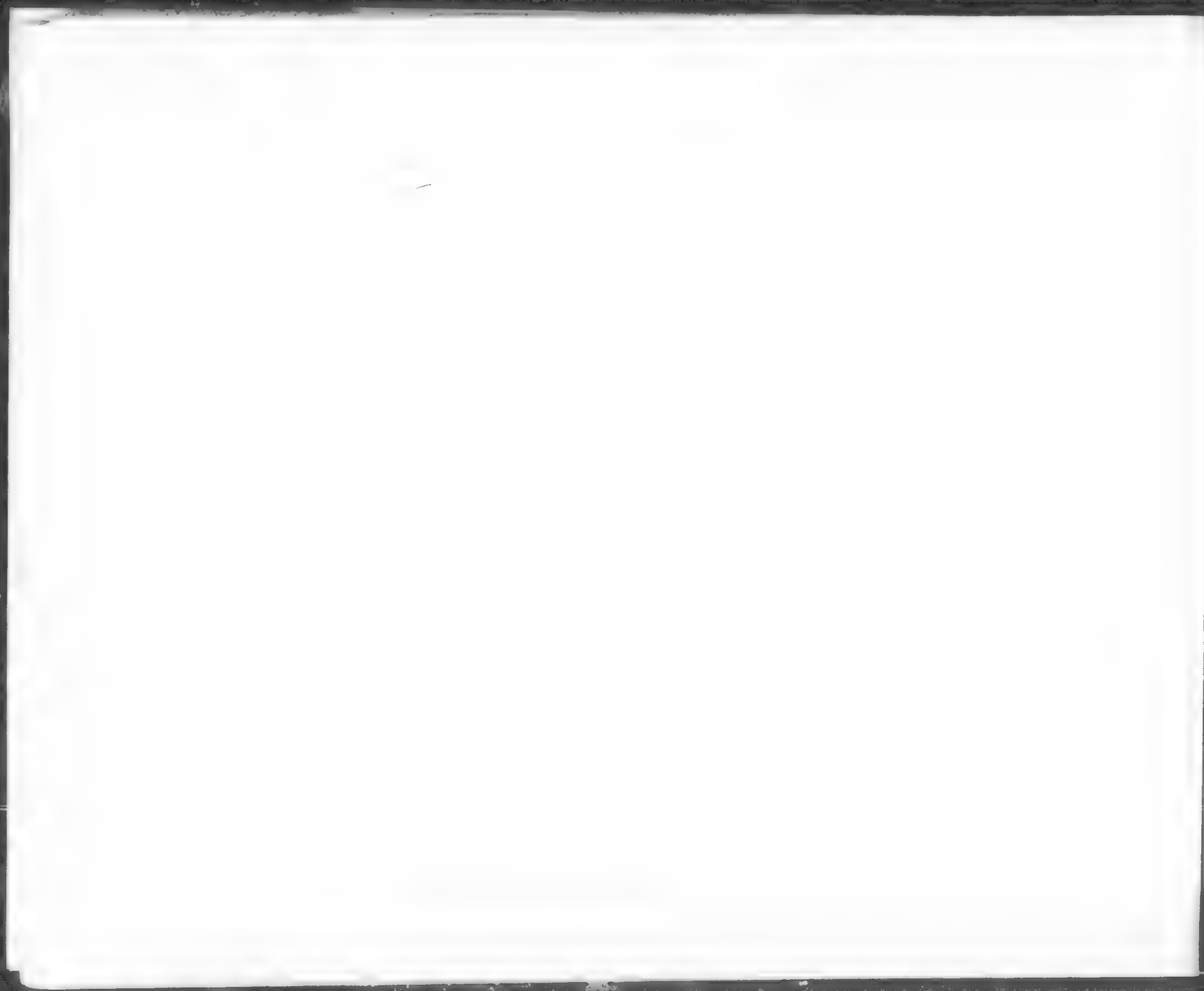
CHAPTER VIII.

CUPID'S PRANKS.

IN ascribing to the opulent little town of Coldwell the credit of possessing at least one source of recreation for its busy citizens, namely, Diderot's Rooms, we had forgotten to mention an institution not at all behind it in attractions. The Skating Rink was a long, wooden building of more extensive dimensions than the Rooms, but lacking any pretension to exterior ornament. Within, it was gaily and even gaudily decorated. At night, lights and music contributed their fascinations to bewilder the unaccustomed spectator. Destitute of theatres, concert halls, public gardens,

promenades, and other places of popular amusement, Coldwell offered to the disappointed pleasure-seeker a haven of refuge in the Rink.

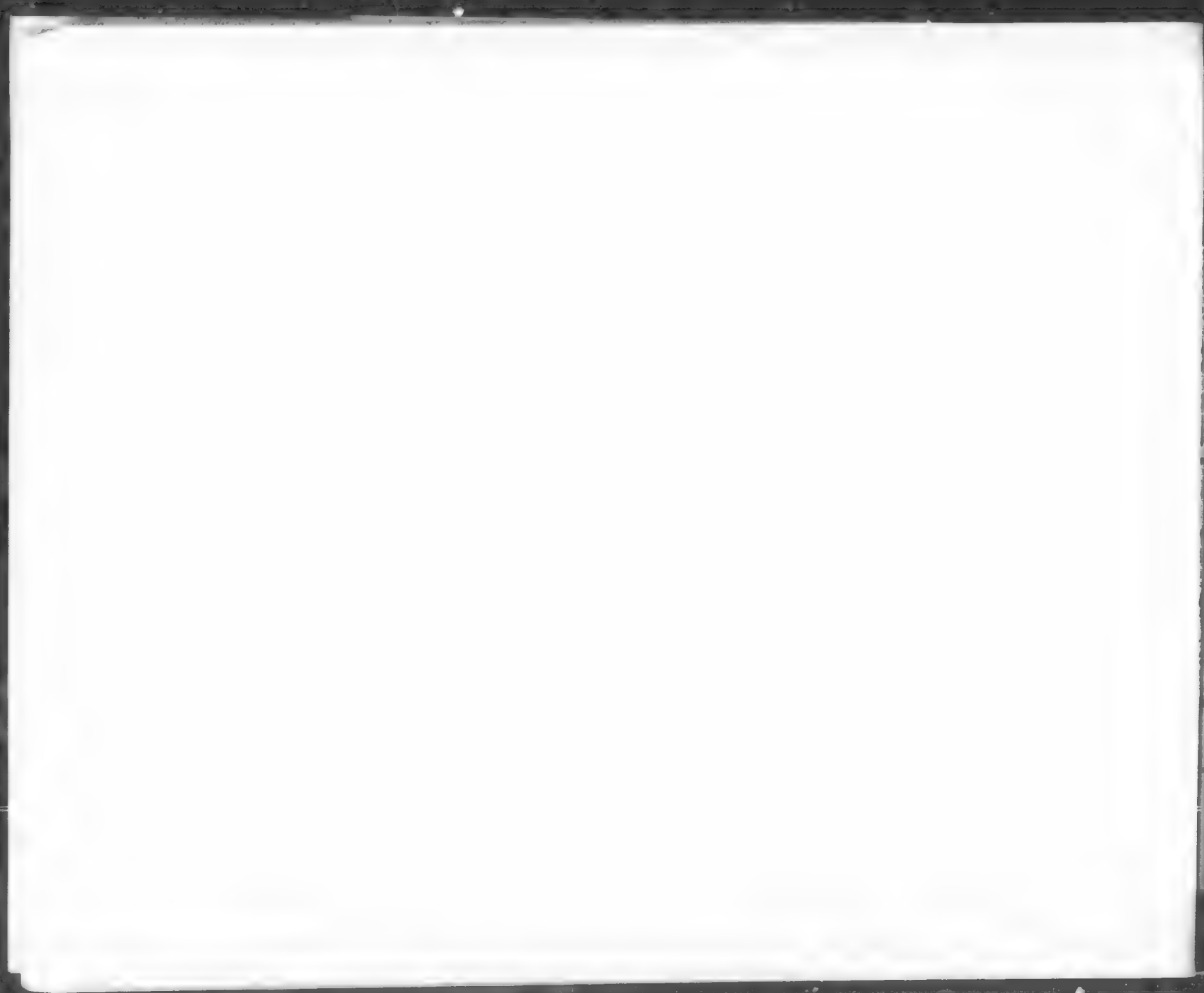
You paid for admission the insignificant sum of ten cents. An elongated specimen of humanity, acting in the capacity of porter, relieved you of this bagatelle, and indicated the entrance to the sparkling cave of Aladdin through a narrow corridor. You, seized by a spirit of adventure, penetrated to the scene of gaiety and icy brilliance. And then did not your heart exult, your brain reel with the excitement? You emerged into a blaze of light. Above you, pendent from the ceiling, in a sort of wooden cradle, the band poured forth its enlivening strains. Around you, beauty, fashion, wealth vied with each other. Railed off from the spacious sheet of glittering ice in the centre of the building, seats were arranged. Into one of these you dropped, if fatigued, and endeavoured at



your ease to revel in the spectacle. Ladies, young, fresh and rosy as the houris of Paradise, glided past you smoothly, tremulously, daintily, more like intangible, airy sprites, than real, substantial entities. It was impossible for these delicious creatures to look solemn, morose or spiteful. The spirit of the place forbade such profanity. Here *Comus* reigned supreme. Laughter, wit, jollity held a carnival. There was endless food for mirth. Unlucky *rencontres* never ceased. Often some one of the giddy, light-hearted houris fell, accidentally of course, and then an *Adonis* glided to her rescue. It was the spot of all others best adapted for Cupid's pranks. Indeed, at the head of the Rink was a conspicuous statue of the god, while at the opposite end a brilliant constellation of gas-jets illuminated the languishing form of his mother.

But all this time the band has been playing, and pretty feet twinkling and glancing over

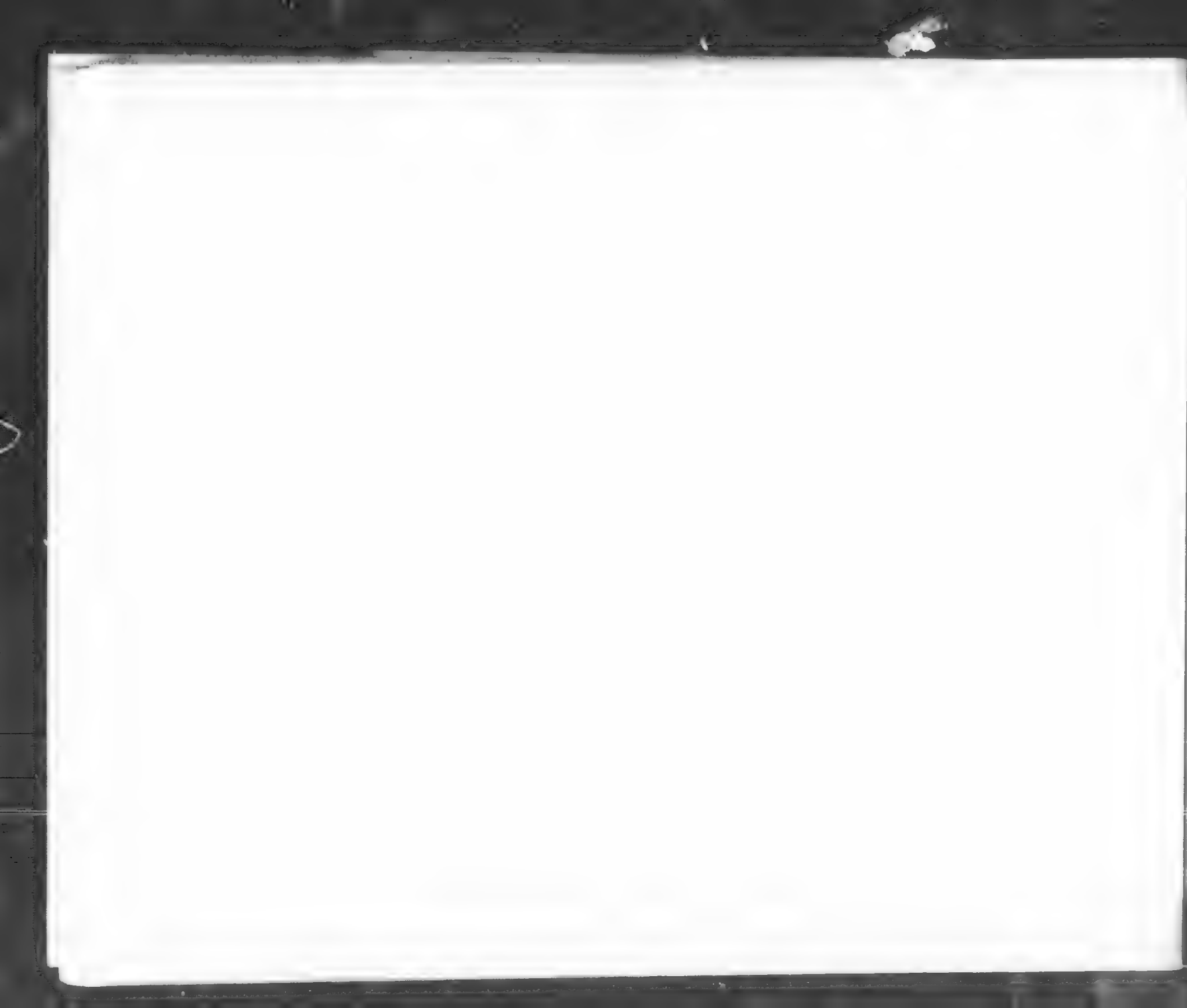
the glistening surface of the ice, in brisk time to the music, for the houris and the youths are dancing a quadrille. What a charming pantomime! How the rosy cheeks grow more rosy, and the golden hair more golden in the flashing light! How the lips of the sweet damsels part to let their pearls be seen, and how their eyes sparkle with healthful, innocent delight! What becomes of the stilted, ceremonial figures of a ball-room quadrille after this? Bah! chill us not with the comparison! It is at the Rink that Nature's beauties triumph. Even Smith, who was seated outside the arena, acknowledged this, and felt a pleasurable tremor thrill him as his eyes followed the motions of one fairy creature, sweeter, sunnier, diviner than all the rest. She was a stranger to him, a lady he had never before seen. But her motions, her face, her figure! What grace, what beauty, what elegance! Where was the mocking fiend in his breast



now? Where his lofty superiority over the herd of mankind? Where his armour-plated philosophy?

He glanced appealingly at Cupid, for he felt that he was getting shot at. He fancied that the mischievous young archer was smiling at him maliciously. He determined to baulk his aim. Shrugging his shoulders with a contemptuous air, Smith rose from his seat, and addressed some acquaintances chatting in the promenade which encircled the icy arena. He did not once look at the unknown lady. He knew too well the weakness of humanity to risk an encounter with the amorous god again. Vain hope! Suddenly there was a little cry, a laugh, some commotion. The lady had tripped and fallen. There she lay, in interesting, charming confusion. Every male biped was at her side in a moment. Smith could not go; he had not his skates. How he ground his teeth! But Smith looked, and looking was just as bad. Cupid, with

lightning rapidity, let fly another arrow. Smith was grievously wounded this time. The lady was being raised by a handsome gallant, whom Smith, with a sharp, bitter pang, which he could not repress, recognized to be Villiers. The latter nodded to him gaily, as much as to say, "What do you think of this, Jack, my boy?" Smith could have seen Villiers hung, drawn, and quartered without one throe of pity. But he masked his feelings, and reciprocated the nod with a sardonic smile. The lady at this moment looked at him for the first time. There must have been something more than ordinarily interesting in his expression. Their eyes met. She did not withdraw her gaze, but there was no boldness, no rude inquisitiveness in her stare. Cupid, ever on the watch for his prey, fired another arrow. Onward it sped on its viewless course. Now he hit another victim, and right in the gold of the target. Cupid knew this by the best of all indications, a blush. The lady,



much embarrassed, looked away from Smith, and joined her partner in the quadrille. She did not exhibit, however, the same animation as before. Her looks were more demure, her actions more grave. An undefinable feeling controlled her. Much as she wished again to behold Smith, and endeavour to find out what it was in his handsome, tranquil face which attracted her, she felt that she dared not do it. It was a self-protective instinct that warned her of some hidden danger, some shoal, some rock. For the first time in her life she experienced the sensation of being abroad upon the ocean of passion with no pilot save her own good judgment. She trembled. Determined not to look at Smith, she tried by a powerful effort of will to exclude him from her thoughts. His image defied her. There it was daguerreotyped upon her brain; a long, smooth face with finely chiselled features, and deep, unfathomable, expressive eyes, pervaded by a look of majestic, earnest thought—like to some face

that she had seen in dreams, a face pregnant with the nobility of high resolves.

Smith, whose soul had already begun to feast upon her, sought to catch her eye with feverish solicitude. He could not succeed. After the quadrille her partner led her to a seat, and slid away again to the air of a lively waltz. Smith decided to approach her, to throw himself in her way, to compel her to look at him once, only once; once again to have those speaking eyes, the windows of her soul, looking into his. But he was forestalled. Villiers was at her side before him. She seemed glad to listen to the soft, honeyed sounds under which that Lovelace knew so well how to inject his poison. But Villiers little dreamed that she used him only as a diversion, only as a means to withdraw her mind from the one object around which her fancy lingered. Smith, defeated in his manoeuvres, passed behind them. He heard her thanking Villiers in sweet tones for his

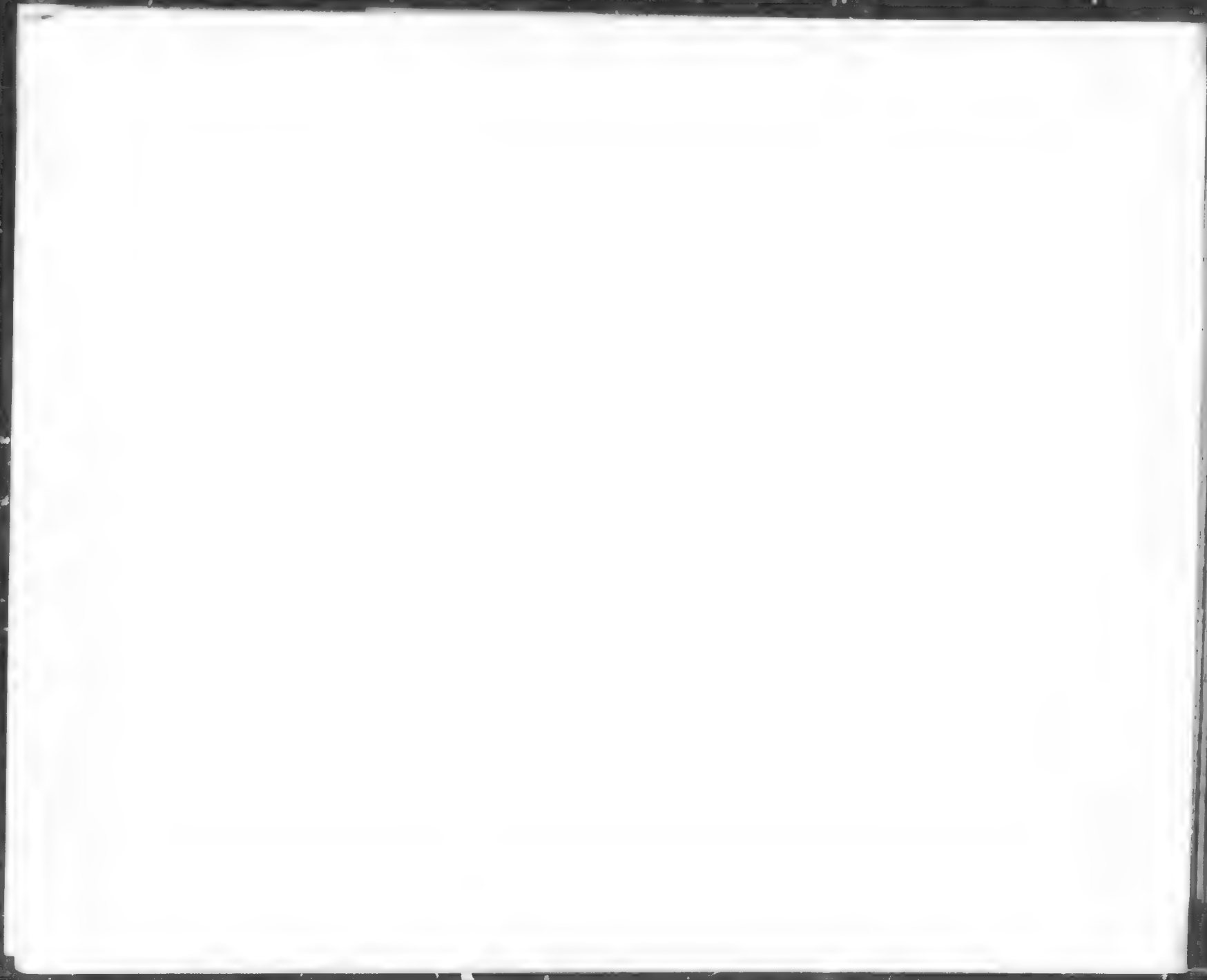


timely aid, and bantering him upon his ready gallantry. Her mellow tones fascinated him, went deep into his soul. Some human voices possess mighty, peculiar charms for us. Had not his pride come to his rescue, Smith would have hovered like a moth around a candle too long, and, to use a homely but expressive phrase, have made a great fool of himself. Alive to this peril (and of all evils Smith dreaded with genuine horror the slightest appearance of looking ridiculous) he moved on. Villiers, intent upon a new conquest, had quite forgotten Smith. He was doing his best to fascinate in his new-found quarry, oblivious of all other considerations.

When Smith turned, shortly after sauntering past them, he saw, with unaffected chagrin, Villiers and the lady arm-in-arm skating over the course; the one pressing his attentions assiduously but politely, the other receiving them with simple, easy grace. The sight galled him.

The harassed victim of Cupid's pranks resolutely walked away, threaded the dark corridor, scowled upon the stalwart porter, although that functionary had done nothing to merit such treatment, and was soon hastening over the snow to Diderot's rooms. The night air revived him wonderfully. He began to laugh at himself and his craven fears immoderately. "John Smith to succumb to the wiles of the sex indeed! Catch him!"

At the rooms he came upon Gilner and Sally love-making. "How absurd they look!" thought Smith. The usual crew thronged the rooms; some drinking, some smoking, some playing billiards; all looking jolly, happy, contented. Approaching Sally, he demanded brandy. She looked pleased and glad to see him. Gilner looked sour. Why should this hawk rob him of his pet dove? But little cared Sally for Gilner's ill-humour. She, without a thought on her



lover's anguish, coquetted with Smith. Some women do such things; it is their nature.

Smith, his mind a little off its poise of equanimity, and his emotions still of that tumultuous sort common to gentlemen writhing under the shafts of love, was overjoyed to ease his pains by a little raillery. He also paid her some fine, well-turned compliments, expatiated largely upon the susceptibility of the male human heart, hinted at the depravity of some feminine beings who arrogated to themselves the admiration of men as their due, and rambled on with similar thin, spread-out sentiments, until the girl, but too ready to catch at a straw, thought that Smith must be getting in love with her.

Having innocently done this mischief, off went Smith to his lodgings, greatly soothed in mind, and his breast comparatively tranquil. But somehow or other his quarters wore a more dreary and lonely aspect than usual; they looked dull and dingy and comfortless.

CHAPTER IX.

FLORIMEL.

WE return to our heroine. Who could find it in their hearts to be long absent from her, fair, soft, radiant Florimel?

With audacity, bred of admiration for her beauty and truth and goodness, we intrude upon the young girl as she wiles away the dull hours of a dreary winter afternoon. Of course we know that she is human; all women are human. But under the carnal shell of some women lurks more of pure divinity than a venal, gross world imagines.

It is very possible that before the reader lays



down this book our eulogy of this good young creature may not be voted so fulsome and unwarrantable as it appears.

Mrs. Clarke is with her, busy sewing. Florimel is idle. She finds that she cannot work; she prefers thinking. In truth she looks a great deal more thoughtful than when we last saw her. Her countenance still retains its sweetness of expression; but the look of childish unconsciousness of self has gone. She seems pensive and self-conscious. What has wrought this change? what has given her this languid air of musing melancholy? She could not tell you her thoughts if she tried. They are shapeless, crude, and elude her grasp. A gentle sadness has crept over her. Why? Because the whirlwind of passion has but breathed upon her slumbering soul and moved it, just as the surface of the ocean ripples after a long calm at the first faint touch of the breeze. She has been listless and seemingly preoccupied all day,

unable to give her attention to anything real or tangible.

Mrs. Clarke is her only companion. Her father, having thoroughly mastered his "Comparative Estimates," is now at his courting-house with the germs of some lucky speculation floating in his brain. Happy man! what have the caprices of *la grande passion* to do with him?

"My dear," said Mrs. Clarke, "you seem strangely quiet and mopish to-day! What is the matter, my love?"

Florimel started, surprised by a question the import of which she hardly gathered. How blind we all are to the bubbleings of those hidden springs at work within us! Florimel was perfectly unconscious of any exterior change being visible in her demeanour towards her sister. Of course she did what all good young sisters do towards their elder ones when tenderly chidden; she embraced and kissed her.



"Nothing is the matter, dear Marion. Why? You know I have promised to have no love but you."

"Love? Bless me! what is the child talking about?"

"I don't know," sighed Florimel, blushing and dropping her head into her sister's lap.

"Ah, Florimel, my darling," said Mrs. Clarke, softly, "you see I was right. You will have your troubles, like the rest of us poor mortals. Now kiss me, and tell me all about it."

"Dear Marion, really I have nothing to tell; only that I love you better than all the world, better than myself, my dear, my more than sister."

Florimel looked up, frank and unembarrassed. Her novel emotion was as yet in subjugation to her will. It was not unlike a small spring, oozing so slightly as to be almost undiscernible even to herself. But once started, *check the stream if you can.*

Mrs. Clarke searchingly glanced into Florimel's loving, intelligent eyes, and, detecting nothing there to confirm her suspicions, believed herself to be mistaken. She changed the topic.

"So you liked the Rink last night, my dear? Tell me who were there. Mr. Villiers, of course?"

"Oh, yes. I had a fall, and he picked me up. How strange you should dislike him! He is quite charming and witty. But I must confess, Marion, that I could never like him very much, fall in love with him, I mean. There is a cold, almost cruel look in his eyes at times. Once or twice, as we were skating round the Rink, I noticed it. It made me shudder. But he is certainly a very agreeable man, for all that."

"Mr. Villiers is a very dangerous man, my love," rejoined Mrs. Clarke. "I warn you against him! Ah, if you could only see my pet, my *beau idéal*, Mr. Smith! You will



soon, my dear; he often comes here. I am quite a favourite of his, do you know. He calls me the most intellectual woman of his acquaintance. Don't laugh, Florimel. Of course I know that it is all flattery, as well as you do.

"No, it isn't, dear Marion. You are very clever, and so is he. I don't know what I shall do when he comes. I shall run away for fear of your both quizzing me. What sort of a looking man is he? Does he look kind and good-tempered?"

"He looks—I can't tell you how he looks. Now you have put the question you quite puzzle me. But one thing I can tell you, and that is that his expression rarely varies. I have observed hardly any variation in it since I first knew him. But his is a face, once seen, you never forget. There is something so uncommon about it; it haunts you. Often and often I catch myself brooding over it, and trying to guess what he is thinking

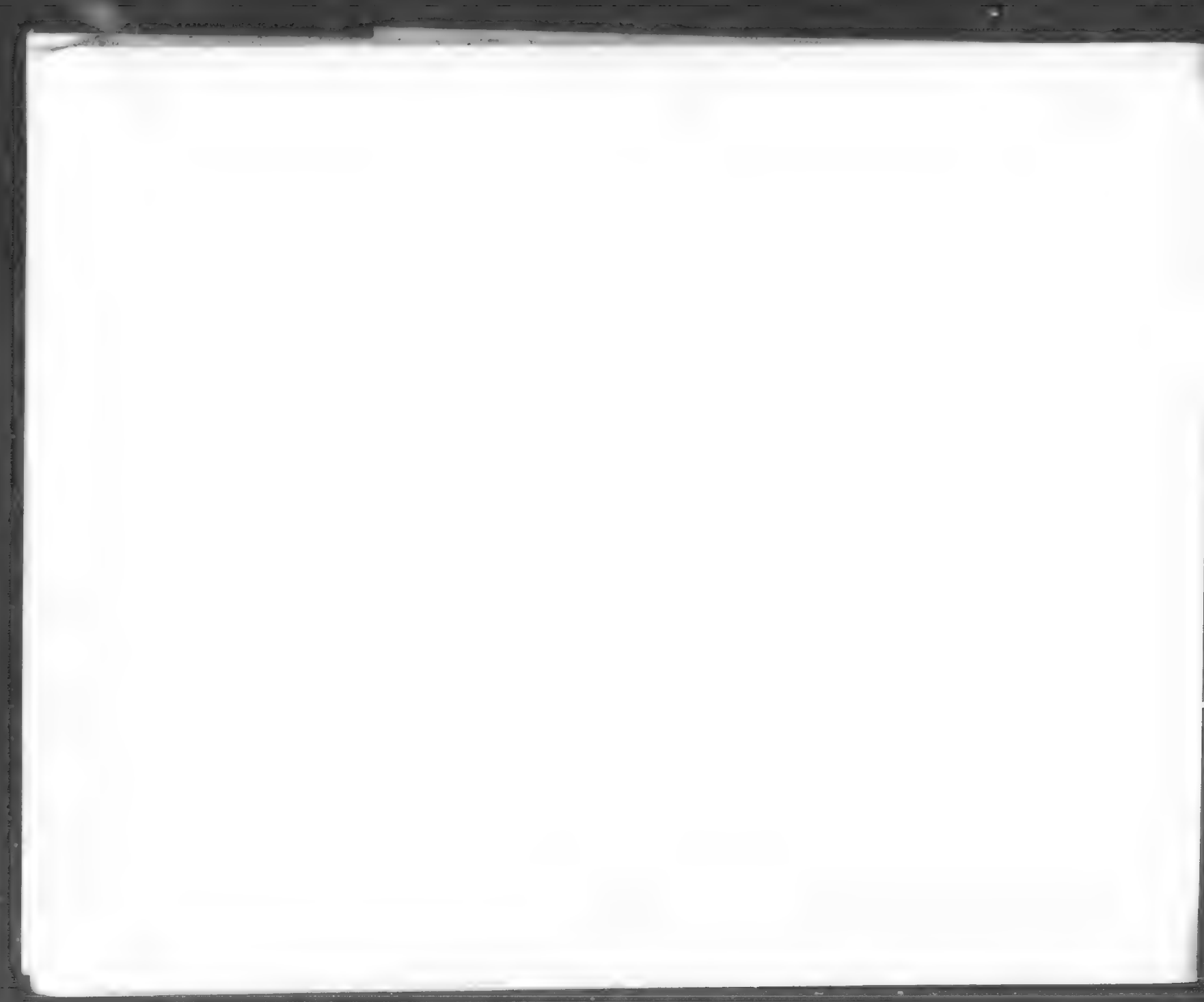
about. He always looks as if he was thinking. I am sure that Mr. Smith is a very extraordinary man, my dear. I am sure, too, that he knows it. Did you sew that button on papa's shirt, dear?"

"Yes, last night. I put it on before I went to the Rink. Dear papa! Do you remember what he said to me about Mr. Smith?"

"Yes, Florimel. But of course he was only joking; although you might do worse than marry Mr. Smith, my dear, believe me. Don't reckon without your host, however. I don't think that Mr. Smith has thoughts of marrying any one. There is no one here clever enough for him."

"Unless it is yourself," said the younger sister, admiringly; "and I know you love him. I am sure you do."

"Nonsense, my darling," said the handsome widow, with a heightening colour; "don't talk about an ugly old woman like me being



in love. And who in the world would care to have me? My chances are all gone now that you are here, Florimel. I feel laid aside on the shelf."

"No, you are not, dear Marion; and perhaps Mr. Smith loves you. If he doesn't, I will try and make him love you, by telling him how kind you are to everybody, and how good and clever; and then he will be sure to marry you and make you happy."

"Stuff and nonsense, you silly girl! Bless me! how fast the child's tongue does rattle! Will you hand me the scissors, my dear? Thanks, love. Well, who did you see besides Mr. Villiers at the Rink, Florimel?"

"Oh, I saw a lot of people that I did not know. But all was so bright and dazzling that I felt quite bewildered. And, then, you know that I have been so long from home that many of my old friends have grown out of knowledge. I have not forgotten my skating, though. I got along admirably,

and only fell once. I really was quite sorry when we had to leave; it was like a fairy scene in a burlesque. Sometimes, I am told, they have a masquerade. What a sight that must be! Why don't *you* come and skate sometimes, dear Marion?"

"Because, Florimel, such frivolity has lost the power to enchant me. Mr. Smith and I are quite agreed upon the subject of Skating Rinks. He humorously calls them pandemoniums for *falling* angels, I call them pandemoniums for—"

"*Fallen* ones," interposed a rich, masculine voice.

The owner of the voice entered the room simultaneously with his sarcasm.

The ladies, with a start, recognized Villiers. He came forward, bowing and laughing.

"A thousand apologies, ladies, for my unceremonious call and very ungallant salutation. But Mrs. Clarke and I are old friends," added he, turning quickly to Florimel; "and



for some time past, just three days, I believe, have been entertaining a Platonic affection for each other. Doubtless, Miss Jones, you will infer from my injudicious and somewhat rude, if not venomous and sarcastic language about the *fallen* angels, that I entertain rather *Plutonic* than Platonic feelings towards your sex. But Mrs. Clarke can correct such an unfortunate impression. Some men have sacrificed their best friends for a joke; but I hope that what I frankly confess to be a foible with me will not lose me the good opinion of Miss Jones. May I ask her not for a moment to attribute to my disreputable observation any deeper signification than that which the harmless play upon the word implied."

Florimel, who had arisen and was looking a little disconcerted, bowed gravely.

"The object of wit, Mr. Villiers, is to imply a great deal more than what terms signify," said Mrs. Clarke, coldly extending her

hand, "You cannot deceive us in that way. Florimel, would you mind getting me my thimble, like the dear you are, up in my boudoir?"

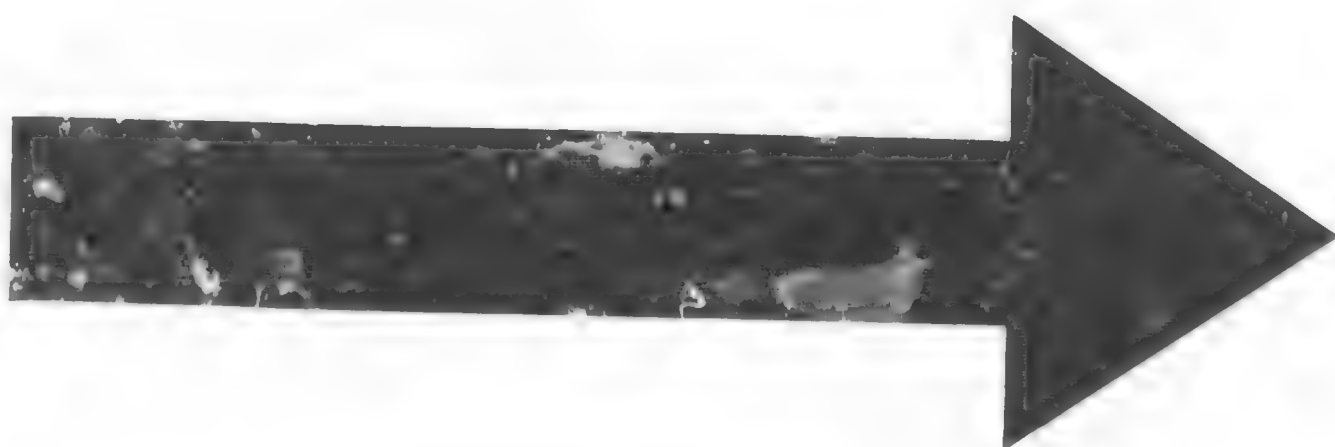
While she was gone, Villiers, to keep his hand in, decided to amuse himself with Mrs. Clarke. He gracefully threw himself upon the sofa, clasped his hands behind his head, and smiled complacently.

"And how has my Calypso consoled herself since I left her?" asked he, with an air of royal condescension.

"Oh! Calypso has been in despair, Mr. Villiers. She has heard that you are not going to Van Dieman's Land, as she fondly anticipated, but intend wintering here."

Villiers twirled his moustache reflectively. "This fish is on the line, but must be played cautiously," thought he.

"Mrs. Clarke, do you know that I am quite enchanted with Miss Jones? She seems to possess such an amiable temper, and



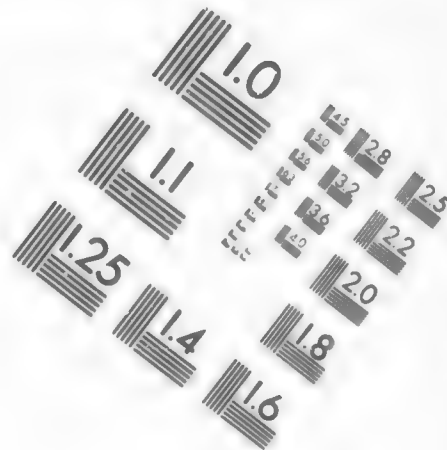
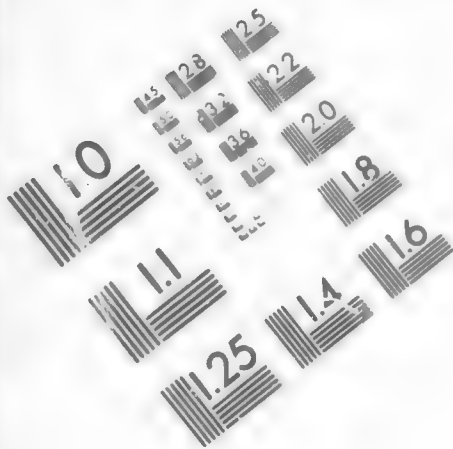
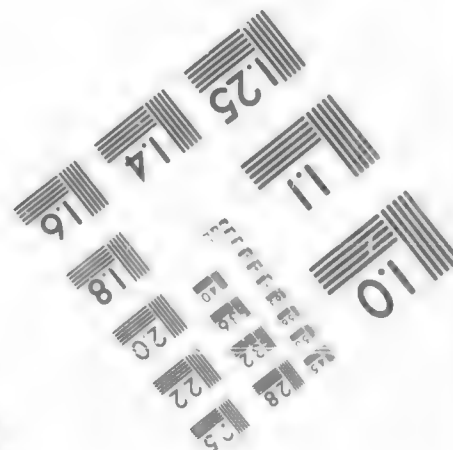
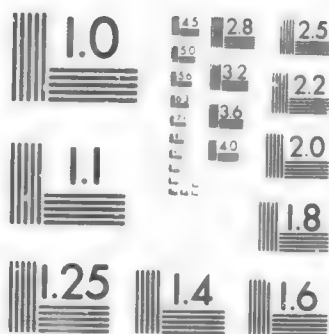


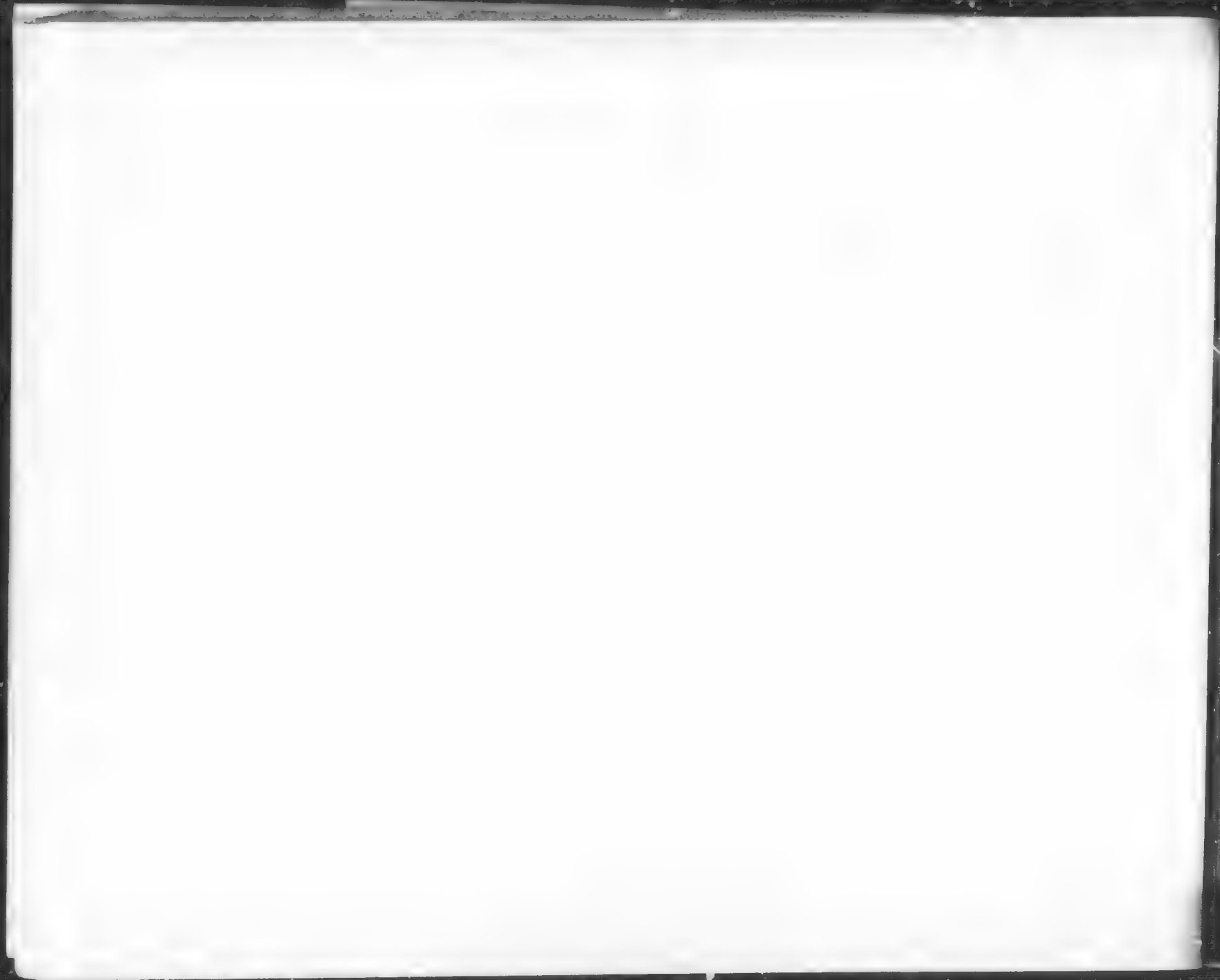
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doesn't make viperish speeches. Do you object to having your share in our contract transferred to her? She wants a little initiation into the intoxicating delights of flirting, you know; and a draught of the champagne of social life, such as I could give her, would, I assure you, be something worth having. Pray do not stop the sibilation of that romantic air, I beg. You have paused. Egad! it's divine, quite divine, I assure you. But if you won't sing or let me play the swan and die in music, pray talk. Your voice is equally charming in all styles."

"I am sorry, Mr. Villiers, but at this moment I labour under a dearth of ideas. I beg to be excused."

"Very well, then, hum! What is it the song says? Life is all a hum. No, egad! that's not it. *Love* is all a hum, that's more like it. Go ahead, gentle lady, and I will do the talking. Egad! I labour just now under a flow of ideas, a torrent, a deluge of them.

You shall have a dissertation on *Love*, Mrs. Clarke, divine, ecstatic love. Ah! here comes the fount of inspiration, fresh and gushing. Ye gods! into what rivers of ecstasy shall I not plunge."

Florimel at this moment entered, and presented Mrs. Clarke with the thimble. She looked a little flushed, and, if possible, more beautiful than ever. The secret of the flush was the audacious look of admiration with which Villiers was regarding her. She was unaccustomed to such kind of admiration. She felt, intuitively, that it was impure. Villiers divined her thoughts. There was something in the shocked air with which she looked at him that left no doubt upon his mind about its cause. He hastened to undo the evil effect of his injudicious impertinence. But he was too late. Before he could get to his feet Florimel had glided from the room noiselessly and swiftly.

Mrs. Clarke, happy in the possession of



her thimble, did not recall Florimel. Why should she?

"Egad! I suppose your sister thinks me a wild beast, Mrs. Clarke. She has fled from me like a startled deer. Only fancy, madam, the meagre preliminary steps for a flirtation producing such a disastrous calamity!"

"I thought you had promised me a dissertation on Love, Mr. Villiers?" said the lady he had appealed to, sewing away with exemplary vigour.

"Oh! hang Love! Mrs. Clarke, I am sorry, but I must postpone our rambles in Arcadian bowers until our next meeting. I have some matters on hand demanding immediate attention. Entranced with your charming society, I had well-nigh forgotten them. Good-day."

"Good-bye, Mr. Villiers, don't get drowned, please, in those rivers of ecstasy into which you were about to plunge."

Mrs. Clarke parted her lips in a mocking smile. Villiers, disgusted and irritated, left her.

He tramped through the snow, growling savagely. "Ah!" muttered he, "I have made a false move. This is a good girl I have to deal with, a good girl. Pshaw! I should have seen it at first, and not have made such a booby of myself! Henceforth she shall find me an angel of light—an angel of light."

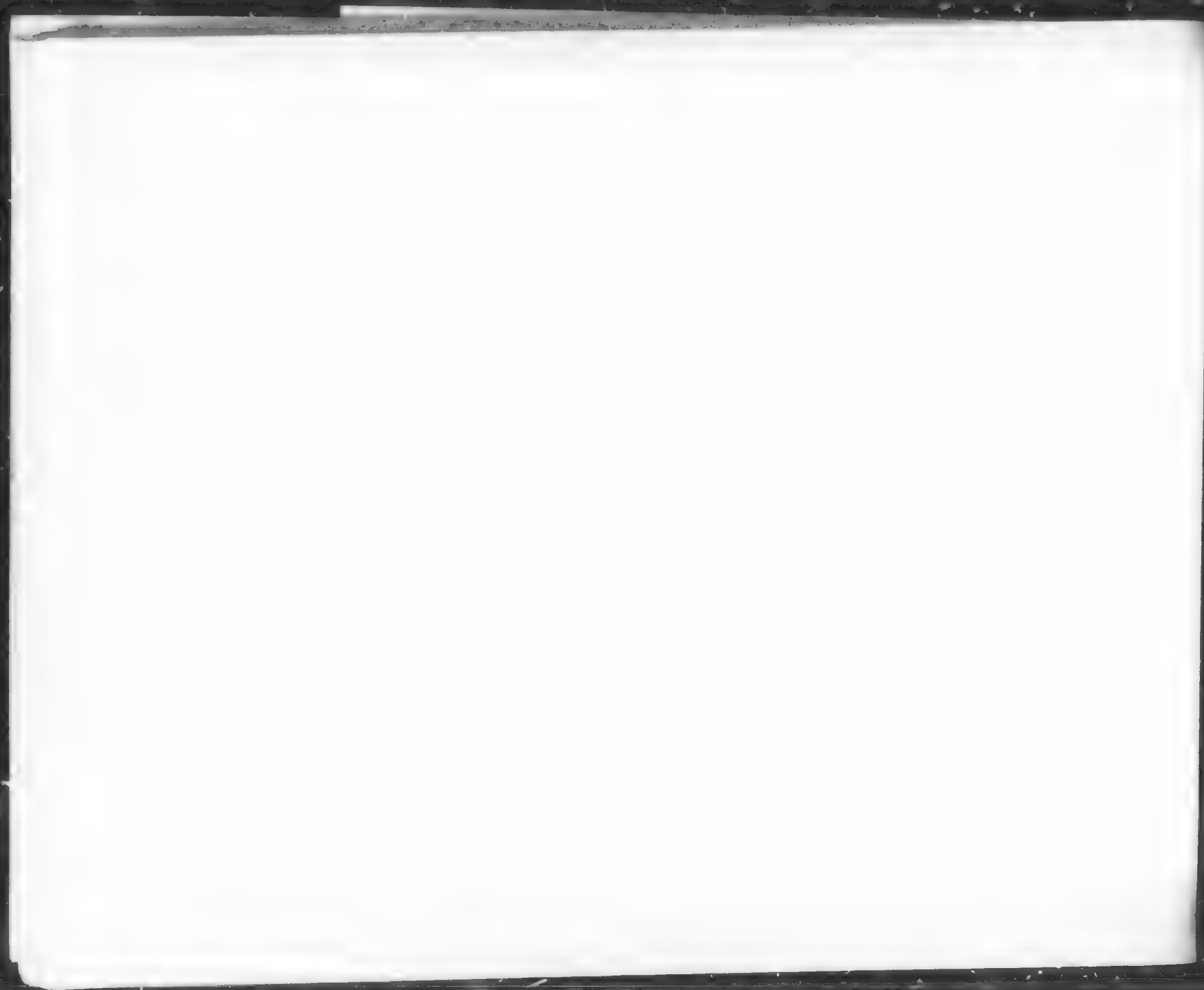
Mrs. Clarke, the moment he was gone, went to her sister and embraced her.

"My dear Florimel, I owe you so much! You quite defeated Mr. Villier's designs, and so innocently too. Ha! ha! The superb lady-killer is quite *hors de combat*."

"I think that Mr. Villiers insulted me, Marion. I think him a very wicked man."

Florimel coloured indignantly.

"Why, my dear, do you think him a wicked man?"



"Because he looked like one, dear Marion. Didn't you see his look?"

"I did, my dear. But his looks are nothing new to me. They are habitual with him. Some day or other, Florimel, I'll describe at length what his views on women are. Men such as he are by no means uncommon in the world, so that the description ought not to present any novelty. But for you, dearest Florimel, by nature pure and unsuspicious, it will seem new and startling. I would to God it were so to me also! Never mind, my love, all men are not alike, thank Heaven! Papa is different, and Mr. Smith, and so was my poor dear husband."

Mrs. Clarke never tired of impressing upon her sister's mind the virtues of her glorious triumvirate in which Smith had so happily found a place.

"Surely," thought Florimel, "this Mr. Smith must be an angel, and Marion loves him."

CHAPTER X.

CHECK THE STREAM IF YOU CAN.

To cut a long story short, Smith and Florimel had fallen in love with each other at first sight. In an unguarded moment, passion surprised them. They are uneasy and nervous, sanguine and despondent by turns, generally unfit for practical affairs, and fast getting into the fever without recognizing the influence that has come upon them. It was the source of the stream rising in their bosoms and trickling, drop by drop, drop by drop, until in a broad, strong gush its character would be shown certain, unmistakable, then,—*check it if you can.* It will laugh them to scorn,



toss them hither and thither in the eddy, and either wreck them irretrievably, or cast them high and dry upon the solid, immovable rock of matrimony.

The evening after Cupid's pranks at the Rink, Smith found his way to Jones' house quite naturally, and got an introduction to Florimel. Villiers was not there, so that he had her all to himself. They got along famously. Florimel was a little shy at first, he was so clever, you know! But under the happy, gifted way in which he looked at things, this feeling wore off, and she felt that if he was, indeed, as clever as he was reputed to be, he did not seem to possess the most remote consciousness of it. She found it impossible to look into his clear, earnest eyes, and not feel herself perfectly at her ease with him. His expression was so different to that of Villiers, it was so unassuming, deferential even, and above all so permeated with something above and beyond the mere animal,

sensual look that eternally hung about Villiers. Florimel apprehended all these distinctions between the two men in a moment, and her soul at once, by one of those strange impulses so common and yet so mysterious, claimed for itself affinity with his. It was all done without any sudden, tremulous shock to the feelings, it was not emotional, startling her into self-examination and nervous alarms, but quite a thing of course, as if it had been ordained so to be from the creation of the world. Looking into his eyes, those speaking, sincere, good eyes, she read her own soul in them, and did not trouble herself, as yet, with any harassing fears about the dangers of so reading herself there. "No wonder Marion loves him!" thought she; "dear Marion! and she shall marry him too, that she shall, and then he will be my brother."

Thus mused the young girl for the twentieth time on the evening of their first meeting. The idea that she herself might marry him



never occurred to her; the great flood of her affections having hitherto set towards her sister, how could she at once discover that the current was being diverted into another channel? No, not a thought disloyal to her sister did Florimel cherish.

Smith, upon his part, was drawn towards Florimel, but more consciously, which made it the more difficult for him to feel unembarrassed. Evening after evening found him at the house of Jones, discussing with that gentleman the relative value of the "Comparative Estimates," talking philosophy to Mrs. Clarke, and falling more and more in love with Florimel. An acute consciousness of the real state of his feelings finally attacked him. Smith discovered, long before Florimel did, that he was in love.

Villiers all this time had not been idle. He performed the part of an "angel of light" most angelically. He behaved with exemplary decorum and politeness to the ladies, so

much so, that Mrs. Clarke began to think that she might have been deceived in Villiers after all. There were some good points about him, and perhaps she was prejudiced, and had been too hasty in her judgment. To Florimel he was most courteous and considerate. He did not appear at Jones' nearly so often as Smith, but when he did he largely monopolized the society of Florimel. Smith, self-conscious, and embarrassed, talked more to Mrs. Clarke. And this was Villiers' opportunity; an opportunity, indeed, that no man knew better how to make the most of. With an agreeable smile ever at his command, and an unction of manner at times, acquired early in the school of fashion and the world, Villiers, in the eyes of an unsophisticated girl, appeared thoroughly genuine and honest. But the practised reader of physiognomy would not be deceived. The mouth and the eye told against him. He could not always govern their expression. Few men have the



gift of calling into a hard, cold, worldly eye, any expression akin to feeling, control their features as they will. The eye of Villiers, in spite of his splendid acting, was cruel and selfish, and Florimel, in some undefined sort of way, knew this, much as she felt herself drawn towards him in other respects. Villiers did not succeed in deceiving Florimel. He thought so, for he was vain and self-confident to a fault, like all such characters. But Florimel possessed a mind encased in the armour of virtue, and such armour is invulnerable.

Smith did not fail to regard the intercourse of Villiers with Florimel with suspicion. He was tortured by jealous fears. He underestimated his own powers of attraction, and over-estimated those of his rival. The solitary joy in the bitterness of his cup was the determination with which Florimel resisted the urgent solicitations of Villiers to allow him to accompany her to the Rink. She declined

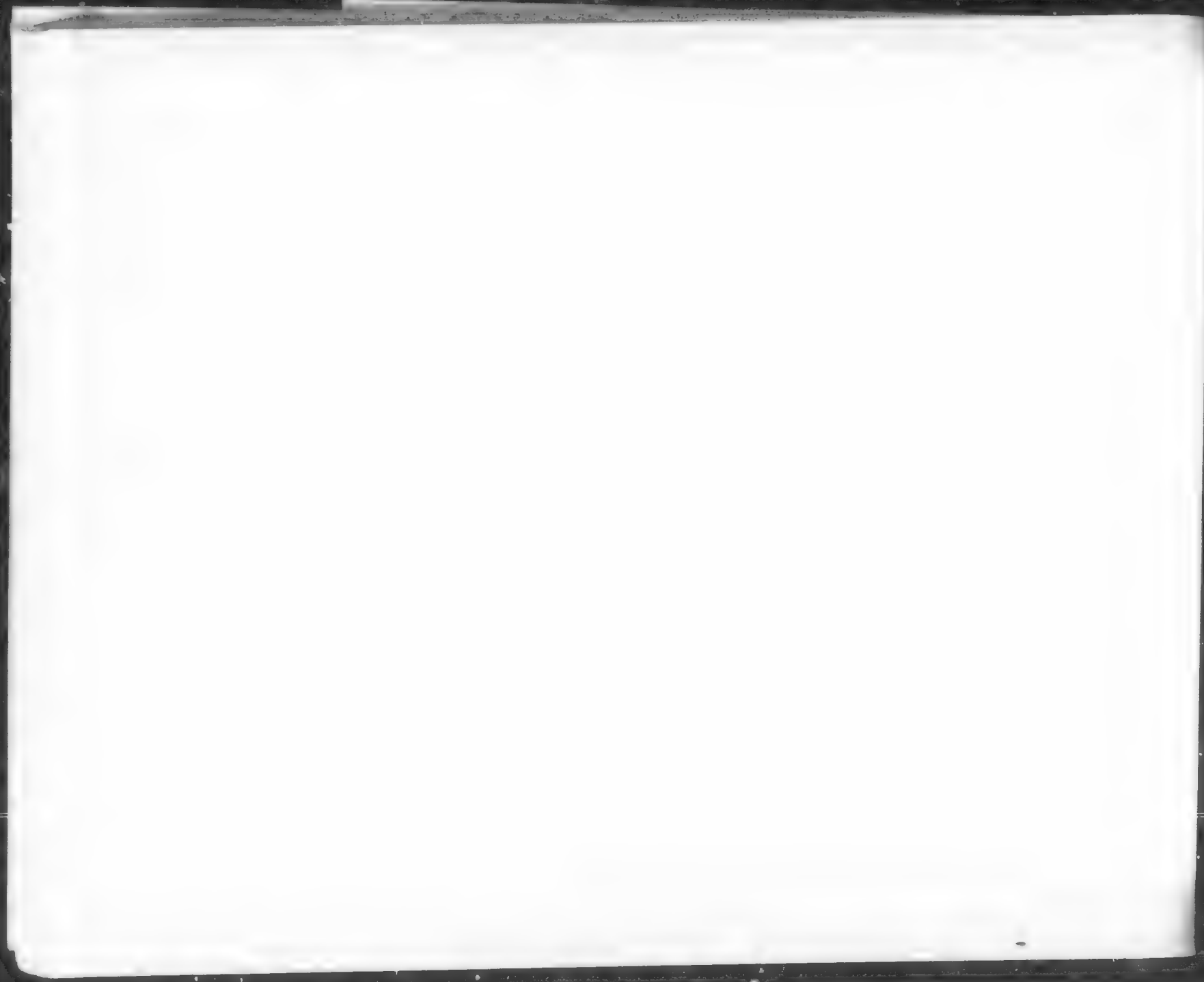
going there, chiefly, no doubt, on account of Mrs. Clarke's strictures. Smith, therefore, could keep the two constantly under his eye. While talking to Mrs. Clarke, he stole many a furtive glance at them. But even his jealous eye had detected nothing, as yet, indicative of a mutual passion. He knew that the visits of Villiers were not without their object, but he could not construe any of the actions of Florimel into even tacit encouragement of them. His fears were for the future. He dreaded lest a flame should spring up unconsciously to themselves, that might crush his own hopes for ever. Nevertheless, so great was the pride or hypersensitiveness of Smith's nature, that he made no open advances to Florimel. His eyes looked tenderly into hers sometimes, when he left her for the night, and his tones softened so as to thrill her with vague longing after some unimagined happiness, but she did not interpret these signs into a passion upon his part

for herself. Absorbed in a scheme for the union of Smith and her sister, Florimel was obstinately blind to them.

Mrs. Clarke was in her glory. She had always liked Smith, that dear, delightful, clever fellow Smith! Now he seemed actually tossed by some curious revolution in the wheel of Fortune into her lap. And she was not going to let him go in a hurry. She listened to his queer, metaphysical sayings with undisguised admiration. To steal into his good graces, she promised to study Hobbes and Kant, and Cousin, and all the other intellectual philosophers. She had read the first page of Locke's "Conduct of the Understanding" and, of course, knew something about that. The title-page of Smith's own extraordinary work, "Everything a Mistake; or a Screw loose somewhere," she had also studied, and could thus, so to speak, debate with him upon his own ground. Smith would often smile, in spite of himself, at

some of the sententious observations she hazarded. They were so *naïve*, so enthusiastic, and so very wide of the mark. Mrs. Clarke's philosophy was of the sentimental sort, all passion and flummery. There was nothing analytic or commonly rational about it. But, philosophy or no philosophy, Mrs. Clarke was getting desperately in love with Smith, and, from the attentions he paid her, inferred that her sentiments were reciprocated. She had ceased for some time to fulfil her flirting compact with Villiers—indeed, she would well-nigh have forgotten him, had that gentleman been one who could allow himself to be forgotten. But Villiers still designed a hold upon the thoughts of Mrs. Clarke. Attentive as he was to Florimel, he was not oblivious of her sister, and provoked her very often into fencing with him.

One evening he surprised Mrs. Clarke, ogling Smith and talking philosophy in her usual gushing, sentimental fashion.



"O Love, for me thy power!" cried Villiers, clasping his hands melodramatically. Mrs. Clarke felt a tell-tale blush overspread her features, but recovered herself in a moment.

"By-the-bye, Mr. Villiers, you never treated us to that dissertation on Love which you promised," and the lady showed her teeth maliciously. But the gentleman was quite tranquil.

"Didn't I, Mrs. Clarke? then you shall have it now. Love, in my opinion, is one of the prime conditions of existence. We love from instinct, from impulse, because we can't help it. We thus unconsciously obey a law of nature. Egad! a fellow must love something or somebody, eh, Mrs. Clarke? Whether we love too much or not is another question. For myself, ladies and gentlemen, I plead guilty to the charge of not having lived a loveless life. Perhaps I have erred from the opposite evil. It may be that I have loved too much."

"Yourself you mean, Mr. Villiers," broke in Mrs. Clarke, with a taunting laugh.

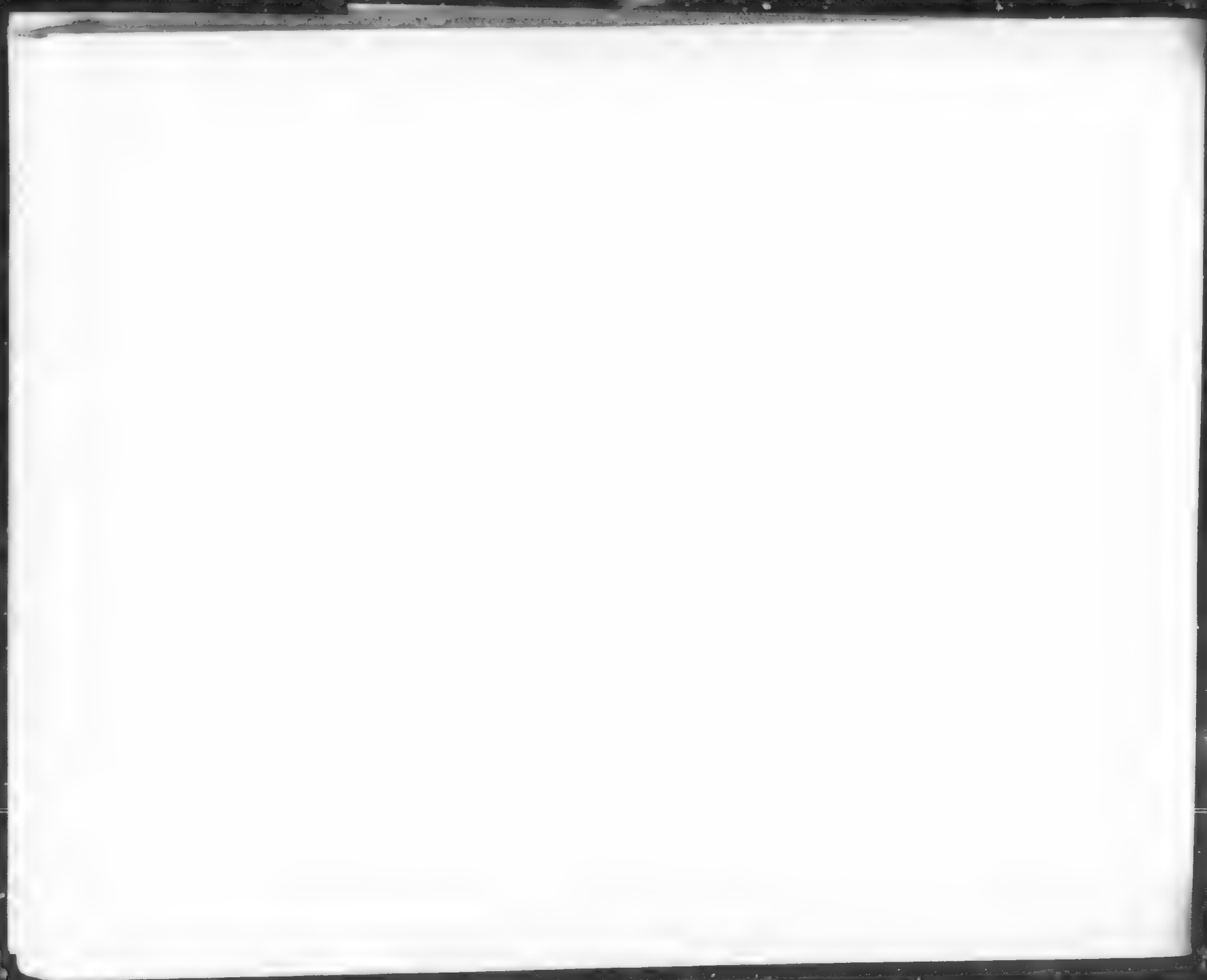
"No, madam, not myself, although I never *forget myself*," replied Villiers, with marked emphasis. "True Love does not worship itself. True Love worships Beauty, Mrs. Clarke. True Love prostrates itself before the graces, and humbly adores in silence—like—like I do, Miss Jones."

There was an awkward pause.

The meaning of the speaker was unmistakable.

It was a trying moment for Florimel, and taxed the little tact she possessed to the utmost. She felt that such boldness merited a stinging rebuff. But how to administer it puzzled her. Mrs. Clarke came to her rescue.

"We hardly expected, Mr. Villiers, that your dissertation was to end in an avowal of love. Florimel, this is the first of many that will assail your ears before the season is over.



It is quite the fashion for dandies to propose in this style. It sensationally breaks the *ennui* under which they all labour."

"Mrs. Clarke," said Villiers, a trifle superciliously, "you have mistaken me. I didn't propose. I never propose. I merely intimated to Miss Jones that I was a happy illustration of my argument that True Love worships Beauty. I was a case in point, you perceive. Miss Jones can't help being beautiful, and, egad! I can't help the True Love, Mrs. Clarke."

"But you can help this impertinence, sir," interposed Smith, rising haughtily.

"Hallo, Jack!" cried the other coolly, "what's the matter? I wasn't speaking to you."

"I know you were not, sir; but I am speaking to you, and—"

"Come, gentlemen, no altercation before ladies, please," said Mrs. Clarke, with dignity. "Be seated, I beg of you, Mr. Smith.

I call upon *you*, in *your* turn, to give us some ideas upon 'True Love.' Now, Mr. Smith, we are all attention," said Mrs. Clarke, good-humouredly.

Villiers had seated himself, and feigned to be listening with an expression of mock ecstasy. But Florimel, her heart yet palpitating from the alarm which the excited interruption of Smith had occasioned, listened with real interest. Smith looked at her. His soul had been moved. His was a chivalrous nature, and what he said was just what might have been expected of him.

"There is only one genuine sort of True Love," said he, reverentially, "all others are counterfeit. True Love is founded upon the principle of self-sacrifice. True Love, in a word, is simply, purely, *self-abnegation*."

This was said with singular eloquence and feeling. There was an earnestness about it that penetrated all hearts. The party soon afterwards broke up.



"*Self-abnegation*," murmured Florimel softly to herself, before going to sleep that night. A nameless feeling crept over her, a feeling which caused her to shiver and weep.

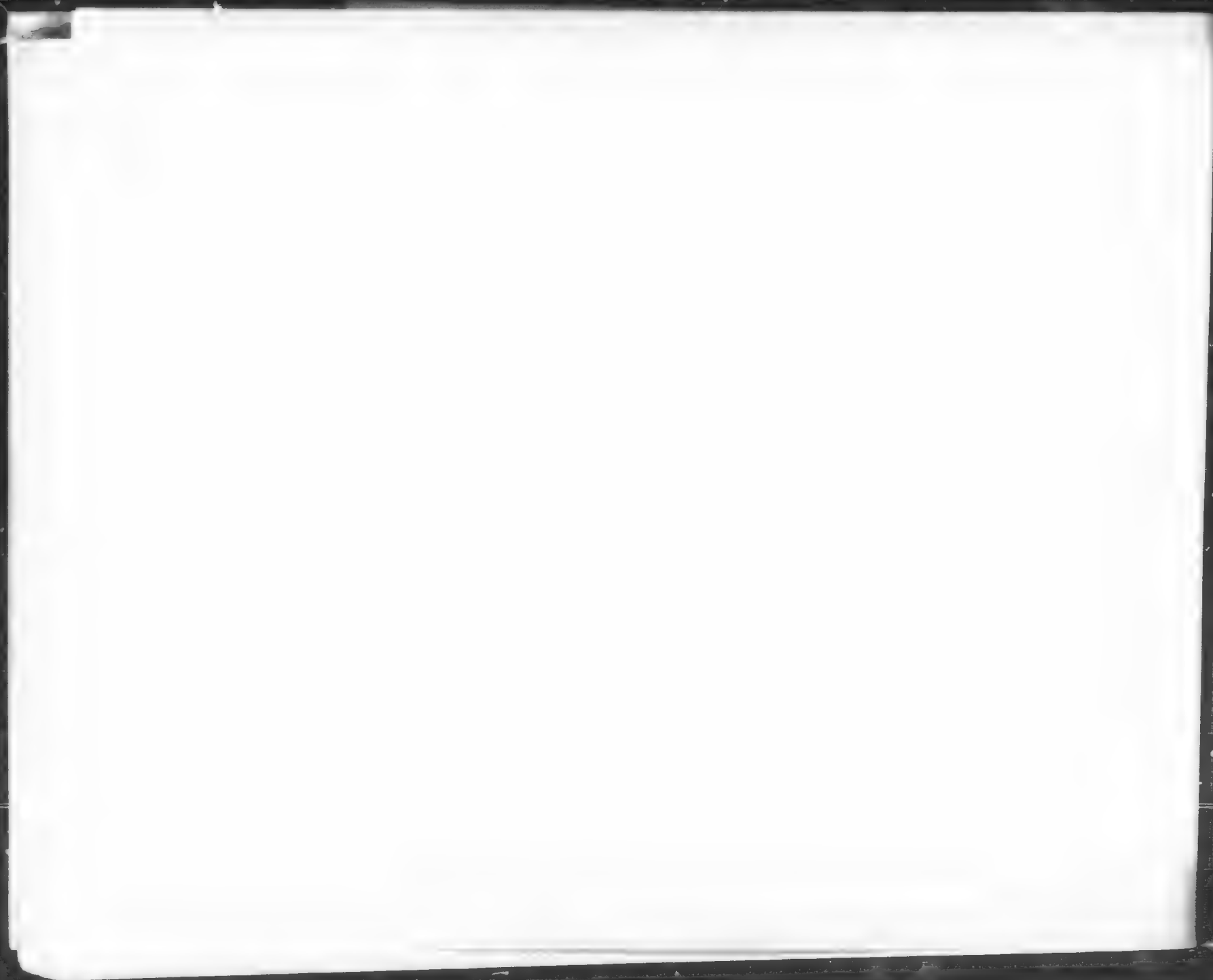
CHAPTER XI.

O LOVE, FOR ME THY POWER!

"Come per me sereno."

La Sonnambula.

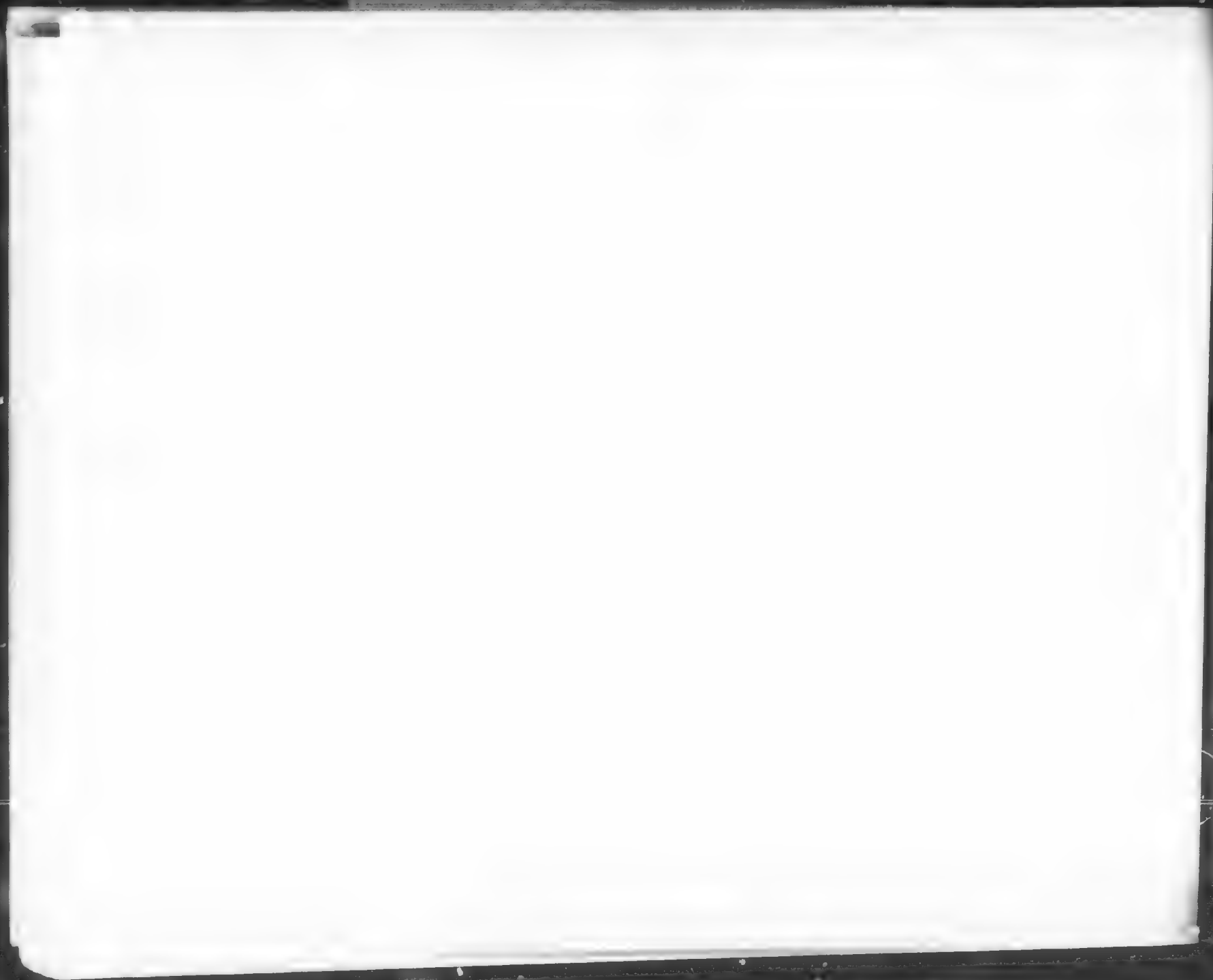
SMITH's words greatly exercised the mind of Florimel. They caused her to think deeply. Her ideas about Love had been very much of the romantic sort up to this time. Girlish prejudices, and the tawdry sentiment paraded in novels and on the stage had given her very undefined, romantic notions upon the subject. But Smith had spoken as if he had really thought the problem out and solved it for ever and a day in the words "self-abne-



gation." There was something, to her mind, absolutely startling in this curt, arbitrary conclusion. She could not help thinking that if this was the key to True Love, very little of it was to be seen in the world; and yet, somehow, the idea had a fascination for her. There was something divine about it, something entirely free from the dross of earth, from that innate selfishness, the mainspring of most human actions. The idea grew upon her. She pondered over it, and, under its chastening influence, she felt that her soul was being more purified, her thoughts more elevated. Her esteem and admiration for Smith naturally increased in a proportionate ratio. Listening to his dialogues with her sister with all her ears, she was struck by the high tone of his sentiments, by his stern, uncompromising regard for principle, by his lofty views of man, his origin and capabilities. The ephemeral existence of a mere unit in the universe like herself seemed

sunk into insignificance, contrasted with the destinies of so many millions, all of whom Smith, by a lordly sweep of his intellect, seemed to take under his wing and protect. He, poor fellow! was all this while simply talking against time, talking for the pleasure of enjoying Florimel's society, although he so rarely directly addressed her.

Thus things went on, the stream widening and running deeper every day, until at length Florimel experienced a dawning consciousness of love within her, and with that consciousness a sharp pain, as if she had been stabbed and stabbed to the heart. She looked into her soul and found it filled with Smith. She determined to study herself honestly, and ascertain how far this was right or prudent. The investigation overwhelmed her with alarm. She began to reflect that only a short time since, a very little time indeed, her soul had been her sister's, only Marion's image had been mirrored on its



crystal surface. But now? Ah! Marion had been right. She remembered her prophecy and her own secret misgivings, she remembered the midnight colloquy in her sister's boudoir, the Northern Lights, her sister's passionate warning and counsels, she remembered them all. But with the recollection came the sickening feeling that now it might be too late, for did she not love? Yes, she did love. She knew it, she felt it. It was a blessed feeling, but, oh! there was so much bitterness mixed with it. It was an idle love, futile and foolish, never to result in happiness. Nay, was it not, for aught she knew to the contrary, positively wicked? How dare she cherish a passion for her sister's lover? But was Smith *really* her sister's lover? It appeared but too evident. He nearly always talked to Marion, rarely to herself, and, when he did, his intellect seemed to stoop at the act, to descend from heights above the clouds to the dead level of the common-

place. Yes, mused she, with a sigh, it was always the commonplace that he talked with her; there was no sentiment in it, no arrow flights of fancy like there always was when he conversed with Marion. Pshaw! the idea of classing herself with Marion, the clever, fascinating Marion, and thinking that such a humble, stupid little girl could win more than a passing thought from a genius like Smith! Her sister's lover, indeed! Of course he was! She had not a doubt of it. And Marion loved him! Yes, she had not a doubt of that either. She recollected how her sister had betrayed the secret in a scarlet flush when she had bantered her about it. And, after all, was it not exactly what she had wished? Ah, yes! but then she did not know that she loved him herself, she was unwitting of the fact that the face she had seen for the first time at the Rink, with such remarkable emotion, was no other than Smith's face, the face of all faces for *her*, the face that haunted her



asleep and awake, the face enshrined in her soul as something too high for earth, and too high for her, a face only to be worshipped and idolized. What witchcraft was it that now placed this face so near to her and yet so far off? Oh! oh! (and she clasped her hands to her forehead) the thought was unbearable—she must go mad, yes, mad; her very heart-strings seemed breaking. It was all true that Marion had said, all true, gospel truth; passion had seized on her for a prey, and she was to be consigned to life-long despair, for she knew now that she loved, ay, loved with all her soul, all her being, all her strength, and the love must be in vain, unrequited, hopeless, sinful. No, no, not sinful—her love should not harm her sister, for she would hide, stifle, and let it consume her before that. With time, perhaps, in the distant future, so far, far away, the intensity of her passion might be softened. Meanwhile she would live for them both, Marion and Smith, and thus make

her passion holy, sinless, serviceable. Ah! this was true love, then—this was self-abnegation! Balm was poured into her wounds. "O Love, for me thy power," still! She would live for something, for somebody, and in promoting the happiness of others alleviate her own pangs of disappointment. "Self-abnegation!" She was beginning to understand what it was—to feel it by experience. And she wondered if Smith, who talked so glibly about it, had ever felt it as she was feeling it.

It will not for a moment be supposed that the emotions agitating Florimel's breast were of instantaneous growth, that she discovered the state of her heart and the misfortunes of her passion all at once. A full consciousness did not take possession of her until some days after Smith had applied the touch-stone in the words "self-abnegation." Little did he reckon that in doing so he had dealt a death-blow to his own hopes, slain himself, as it were, by his own hand!



Mrs. Clarke greatly admired the theory. She thought that the idea was "sweetly pretty" and sentimental, but it was an idea which she could neither conceive nor realize. It was enough for her that Smith was its author, that paragon of wisdom, and the man she loved. She acknowledged the state of her feelings to herself. "O Love, for me thy power!" was a chant she never ceased singing; there was a divine melody in it ravishingly delightful.

Mrs. Clarke and Florimel were in love with the same man; this was the upshot of it—one, with the fever of violent passion, unthinking, selfish, the other, with a steady glow of zeal, thoughtful for its object, devoted and self-abnegating. The traces of passion differed in each. Florimel grew much paler than her wont, and even sad; her joyous spirits left her, she was no longer buoyant and gay, and her fair brow was pencilled with thought. Her sister was, on the contrary,

restless, excited, exuberant, always singing or talking boisterously, usually about Smith and his speeches, for he was a member of the local parliament, or about some romantic sentiment which she mistook for truth. Mrs. Clarke, indeed, was a true child of nature, of impulse, of passions uncontrollable, and, it may be, evanescent. So much was her judgment blinded in this way, that she failed to notice the change that had come over Florimel. She had eyes, but she saw not. Even her father, Preston Jones, although so absorbed in his codfish and oil and "Comparative Estimates," noticed the change, and questioned Florimel about it, for he thought she was ill; but Mrs. Clarke never saw it, or, if she did, it never once struck her that it had a cause, and one that deserved serious investigation.

"Florimel, dear," said she one morning, as, seated before the looking-glass, she was arranging her hair into rich, heavy folds,



"do you know, love, that I have a little secret for you?"

"For me, dear Marion? What is it?" said Florimel, with a beating heart. She had been schooling herself for this disclosure, which, sooner or later, she felt *must* come. But, in spite of her efforts, her heart would throb and throb and throb, until she fancied that her sister heard it, so she poked the fire desperately and complained of the cold.

"What! are you cold this morning, Florimel, dear? Why, I feel the weather quite warm, and see how the sun is shining! I declare, my love, just look on the window, it is actually thawing!"

"Yes, I know, dear Marion," said the other, her heart still going like a steam pump; "but I feel quite chilly. Go on with the—with the secret, dear Marion."

"Well, I think that John Smith is going to propose to me, my dear, that's all;" and the handsome widow, with ill-disguised pride

and pleasure, tried to treat the matter as quite a thing of course. Florimel for a moment, but only for a moment, lost command of herself. Her brain reeled. She turned away her head, and endeavoured to say something appropriate to such a declaration, but her quivering lips failed her. She poked the fire again.

"God bless me, Florimel, you must be ill! You are trembling as if you had the ague. Tell me, my darling, are you ill? you look like a ghost."

Mrs. Clarke rose up hastily to take her in her arms. Florimel stayed her.

"Don't stir, dear Marion. I am all right; but I think I must have taken cold yesterday. I drove all the way to Kilbride, and got caught in the snow-storm coming home. There, you see I am better already."

She was supporting herself against the mantle-piece, and looked as much like a



ghost as was possible at such remarkably short notice.

Mrs. Clarke, a woman of decision, decided what to do immediately.

"Now, Florimel, my own darling, you are going right to bed *instantly*, and I am going to send for the doctor."

She rang the bell.

"Don't, Marion, don't, I beg of you. This cold is nothing, and dear papa would be so frightened!"

A servant entered.

"A glass of wine, quick," said Mrs. Clarke.

The wine was brought and Florimel drank it. It gave her strength and courage.

"Now, dearest Marion, you see I am quite well again; and, my own dear darling, best-beloved sister, I am so glad you are going to marry—to marry Mr. Smith! I have been wishing it so much. But you said, if you remember, that he was not a marrying man, so that I fancied that it was only an—

only an idle dream of mine. Oh, dear, this wine is getting in my head!"

"It won't hurt you, my dear. You are looking better, but you must be very careful, for you are far from strong just now, and colds are such dangerous things. So you are glad to have Mr. Smith for a brother-in-law, dearest," pursued the widow, all her thoughts running on herself again. "Of course it is rather premature to speak in that way of him yet, but between you and me, dear, there are no secrets, and I may just as well tell you that there can be no possible doubt about it. He is always here, as you know, and pays me such unflagging attention, that there is only one construction to be placed upon it. Dear fellow, if he only knew how I loved him! Jack—I intend to call him Jack, Florimel—do you like it—the name I mean? Good God! what's the matter?"

Mrs. Clarke ran towards her just in time to catch her in her arms. The girl had fainted.

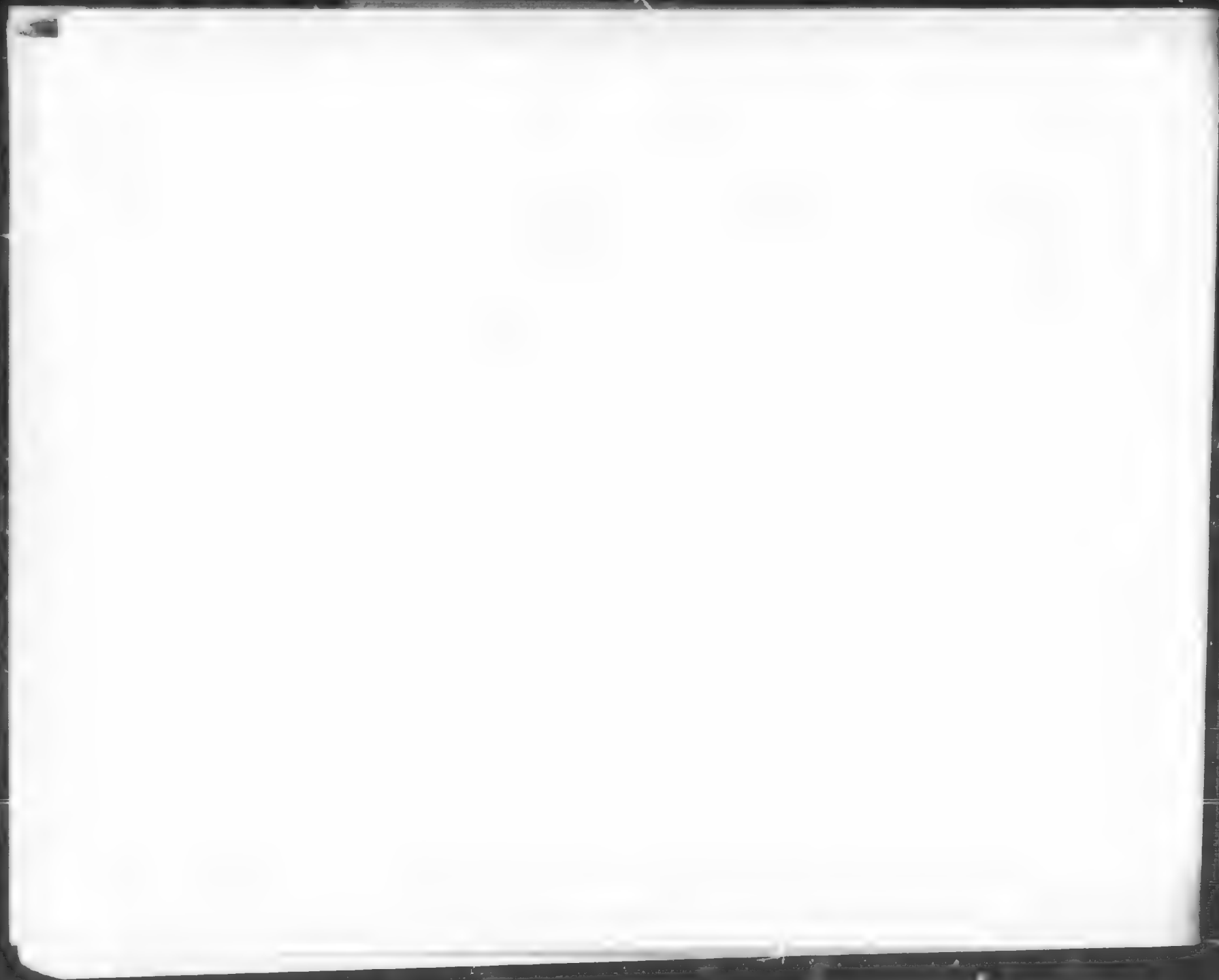


Day after day Florimel had been disciplining her mind to bear with fortitude this revelation, which she persuaded herself her sister must finally make to her. And now that the critical moment had arrived she fainted! Ah! how easy is it, where the heart is concerned, to over-estimate our strength, to plan with dispassionate calmness how to meet our misfortunes; but when they come upon us—heigh presto! we are as weak as kittens, and we faint, to be sure. Of course, quite the proper thing to do! Faint, and become oblivious of it all. Faint, and in the interval of unconsciousness collect our powers to suffer when we come to ourselves again the keener anguish. So poor Florimel, who was destined to go through the thick of the flames of hopeless passion, fainted.

Mrs. Clarke, blissfully ignorant of the fierce ordeal through which the mind of Florimel had been passing, took her to be physically ill, and sent for the doctor. The doctor!

What doctor? Ah! there was no doctor for her disease but one, and he, afflicted by a similar malady, wanted a physician himself, poor fellow!

It was strange that Mrs. Clarke never for a moment suspected what *might* be wrong with Florimel—passing strange, but true, nevertheless. The rack itself would not have wrung from the senseless girl one word as to the real cause of her sufferings. But Mrs. Clarke was spared any fruitless inquiries by the interposition of over-strained nature; Florimel had fainted.



CHAPTER XII.

REJECTED.

Love, or the absorbing passion for some object usually implied by the term, is a great agitator, quite as great, indeed, as the great Daniel O'Connell himself was. Smith was under the thralldom of this great agitator. His mind was perturbed, vexed with doubts about himself, about Florimel, tormented by jealousy of Villiers, haunted by the fear that his was a misplaced attachment only to result in despair, misery, and utter wretchedness.

The sooner Smith tells his love the better.

After some weeks of self-inflicted torture he felt that such a course was the only one open to him. In arriving at this decision he had "crossed the rubicon." He rallied all his forces and prepared himself. Some preparation was necessary. Few men can "pop the question" off-hand in the same easy way as they borrow your umbrella or your money. That was the Villiers style of thing. Villiers, with delicious *sang froid*, had declared himself to Florimel without any increased pulsation of heart, or the nervous twitching of a single muscle in his countenance. But Smith was a man of a different sort; and, moreover, terribly in earnest, a phase of feeling in love affairs that Villiers repudiated entirely. For Smith "to propose" meant casting his all upon a die, the staking of his happiness upon the yes or no of the reply; it was tantamount to turning himself inside out, and exposing that "holy of holies," his heart, to, perchance, the cold, unsympathetic eye of another. In



one of Smith's temperament the effort demanded some moral courage.

He was standing in his little room, the editorial chamber, surrounded by his books. His eye rested on the most curious of all his literary works, "Everything a Mistake, or a Screw Loose Somewhere; a Metaphysical Satire, by John Smith, B.A." He stood with his back to the fire, and his hands in his pockets, musing on his past life, on his probable future, on the marvellous effects of love, which in a few short weeks had so changed and subdued him. Everything *was* a mistake! It was of no use to attempt the rôle of philosopher, and succumb to passion in this way. What *was* philosophy? Was it the discovery of the highest good? Suppose that he had been wrong, and mistaken what Bulwer would have called a "grasping after the unattainable" for happiness, when happiness was all the time at his elbow, in the person of the first lovable girl who was ready to share his lot in

the world, and help him to look at its social anomalies with a bright, cheerful don't-care-a-bit sort of eye. Suppose that metaphysics were all humbug, thinking all humbug, ambition all humbug, and the only real, certain panacea for a tossed, disconsolate soul, requited love and its attendant charms, wedded bliss, domestic comforts, *wee* responsibilities, and all the rest of it. There might be something in this idea, there might be a great deal in it. Enough! he would propose without delay. Smith went out, steering his course straight for the residence of Preston Jones.

The air was bracing and revived him. The snow was crisp, the skies clear, the sun shining. It was a fine day in March, no other than the 17th of March, St. Patrick's Day. This was testified by numbers of well-dressed "sons of the soil" whom he passed, singing "St. Patrick's Day in the Morning" with infinite gusto and rollicking humour.



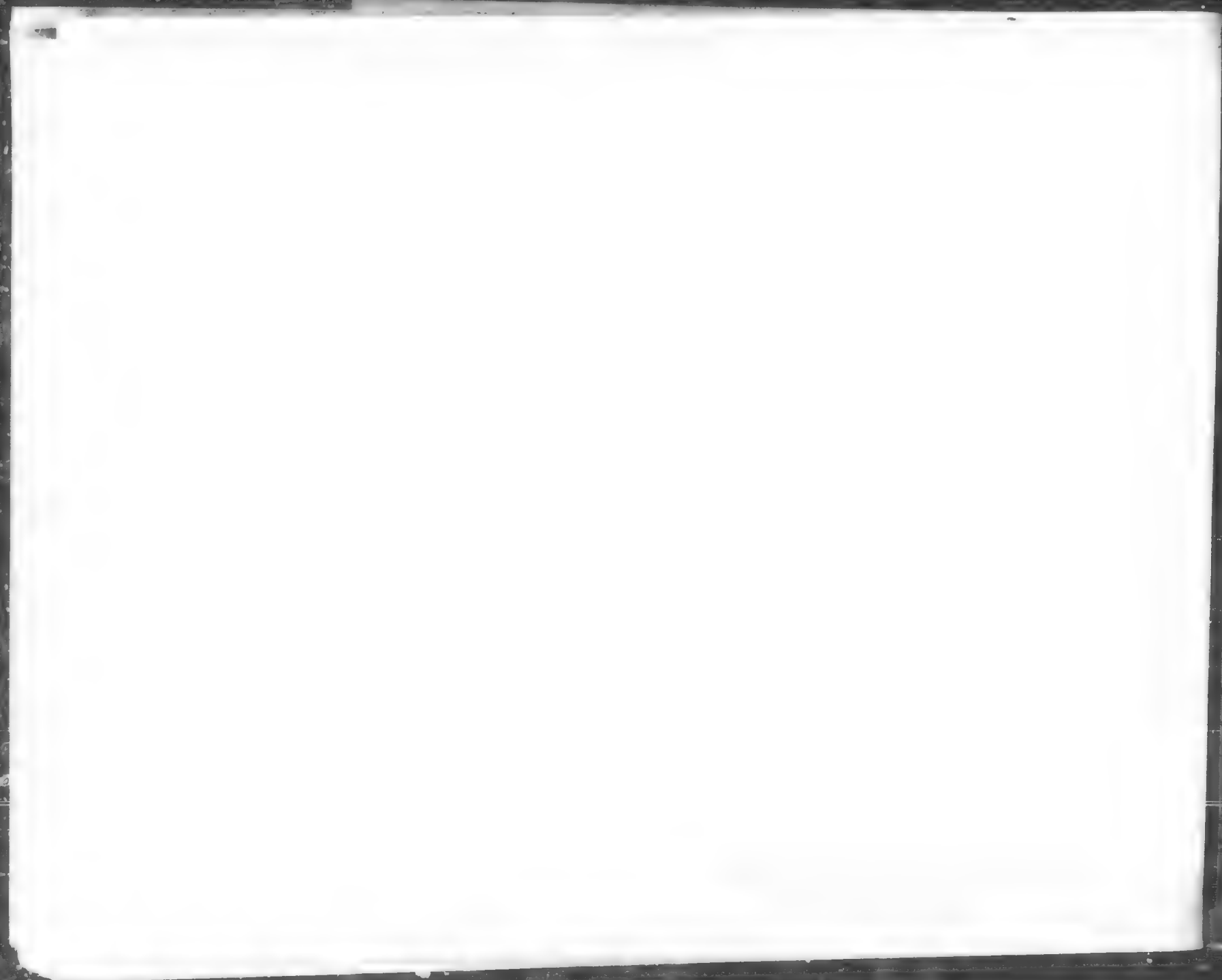
With Newfoundlanders this day is the greatest of all the days in the year. Business is entirely suspended; it is a general holiday. Procession after procession parades the streets, for the great mass of the population derive their origin from the "Green Isle;" and music, rejoicings, whisky, fights, and *speeches* illustrate the fervour with which the anniversary of the great tutelary saint of Ireland is regarded.

Smith's spirits were most certainly acted upon by the jovial sallies with which he was saluted as he went along. He actually caught himself humming "St. Patrick's Day in the Morning" as gaily as the gayest. Oh, he had been such a fool all his life! Philosophy and metaphysics forsooth! Give him a pretty girl, a genial Irishman and "St. Patrick's Day in the Morning," and he'd snap his fingers at metaphysics and philosophy.

Everything is auspicious for him—nature,

his own spirits, and—by all the gods! here comes Florimel herself, all by herself, too, driving a pair of little cream-coloured ponies, in a shell-shaped little sleigh, for all the world like the abode of some sea-nymph. It is St. Patrick's Day, reader, a privileged day. There is just room for two. A recognition, friendly smiles, "the top of the morning to you," much laughter, and Smith and Florimel are side by side, drawn onwards by the cream-coloured ponies, and together by one of those indescribable links of sympathy forged by Eros, with his light, feathery touch, but for all that stronger and more binding than the heaviest fetter Vulcan ever moulded. "O Love, for me thy power!" Their eyes had met again, met as they did at the rank two months before, and—God forgive them!—their souls had gone out to each other to be indissolubly intertwined for ever.

This was Smith's idea of it, as, seated at the side of his goddess, the silver sleigh-bells



jingling merrily, and two hearts beating in unison, the cream-coloured steeds hurried them along. On they drove, infected by the spirit of the hour. The streets of Caldwell were thronged; some driving, some walking, some running, all happy, joyous, free, like themselves. All at once the strains of a band were heard, and soon a long procession, with flags, banners, and emblems, came into sight. "St. Patrick's Day in the Morning" was the tune, and it was the loyal sons of St. Patrick who formed the procession. The cream-coloured steeds grew restive.

"Oh!" cried Florimel, "we must get out of the way. Where shall we go?"

"To Waterford Bridge," prompted Smith, earnestly, "to Waterford Bridge. The road will be deserted in that direction, and—and—pardon me, Miss Jones, but I have something to say to you that can be better said in such a place than in this crowded thoroughfare."

It would be idle to say that Smith's impassioned tones, when he told Florimel that he had something to say to her, did not occasion in her bosom intense agitation. The instinct peculiar to love warned her what the something would be about. In some subtle manner a marvellous sympathy had sprung up between them, so that, even before he told her in burning language of his love for her and her only, her ready and responsive sensibilities divined it. When his declaration was finished, when he had expended in the effort all the rich eloquence at his command, her intense agitation became greater and more apparent. Smith, pale and almost breathless, looked at her in amazement. Her silence and distress appalled him, for it was not of that sort arising from maidenly modesty or reserve.

"My God!" groaned he, with a sudden apprehension of woe, "I am undone!"

She was still silent, her features working

painfully. Oh! hers was such a hard case! To have discovered that she loved Smith, a man with his faith almost plighted to her sister, was bad enough; but now to know that it was herself that he loved to the destruction perhaps of that adored sister's happiness, was a thousand times worse. What was she to do? How answer him?

The poor girl kept silence, enduring all this agony.

Smith buried his face in his hands. He wished—may gracious Heaven pardon him for it!—he wished that a thunderbolt would come out of the clouds and strike him dead.

All this time the sleigh was going on, the cream-coloured ponies trotting swiftly, the bells jingling merrily, and the lively airs discoursed by the band in the distance striking on his ears with every puff of wind that reached him. It was getting unendurable.

"Florimel," whispered he hoarsely at last,

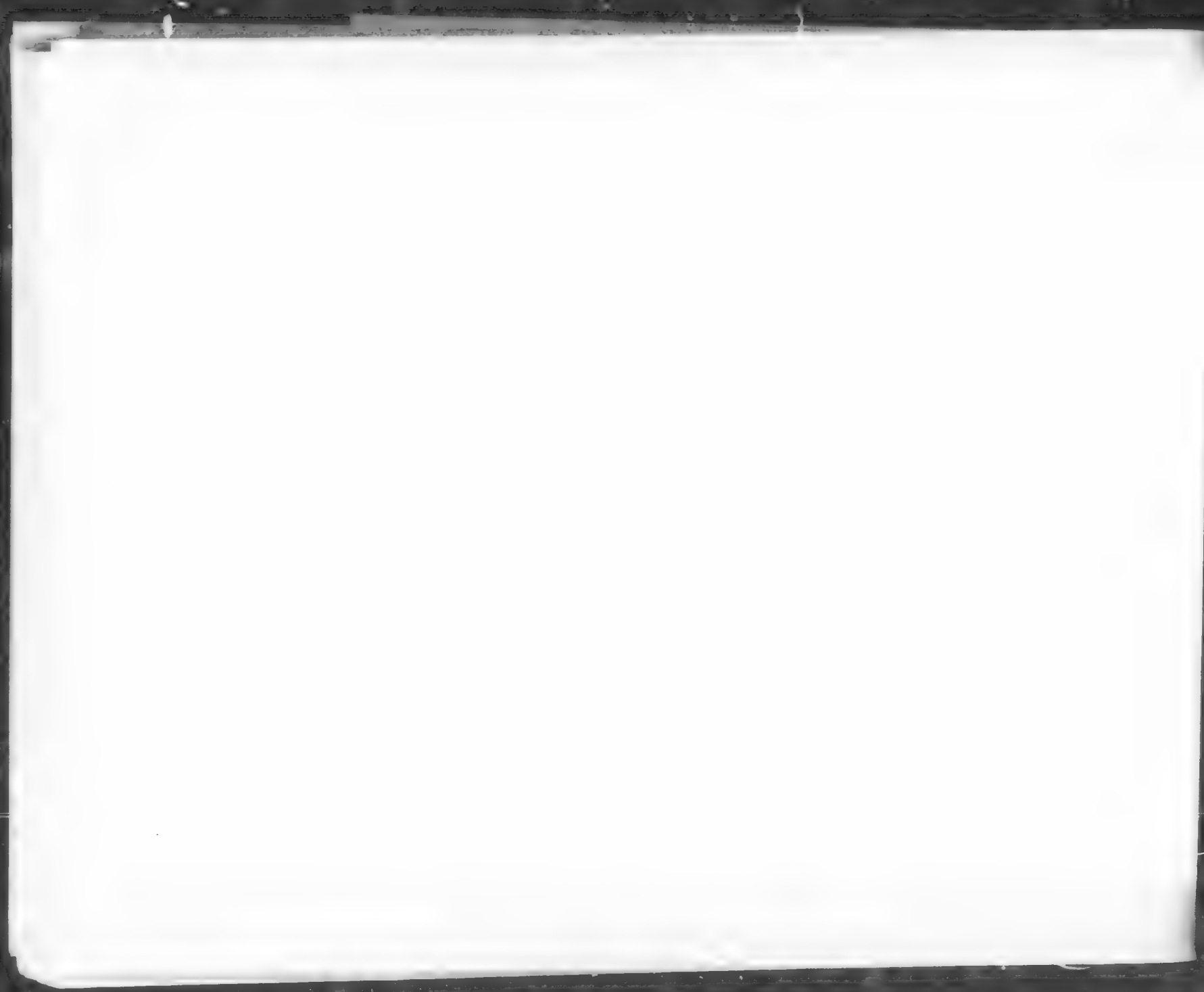
"dearest Florimel, my own darling Florimel, for I know, I *feel*, that you love me, why this agitation? this strange agitation? Look on me, say that my passion is not hopeless. Give some token, if not in words, then by a pressure of the hand, by a look, by some sign."

He attempted to encircle her in his arms. She drew back quickly, with such an expression of anguish on her face, that he felt as if he was committing sacrilege.

"Go—go—Mr. Smith, we can—can never be anything to each other—go—and—and forget me."

"But, my dearest, tell me why," said he, pleadingly. "There is some great mistake somewhere, some misunderstanding. I do not, cannot think that my love is all in vain. Reflect, dearest—"

"No, no—go at once, sir," said the girl firmly, gathering her strength for a resolute effort, "go at once—I am sorry to seem—to



seem rude, but I must ask you to leave my sleigh, sir—or—to suffer me to leave it, sir."

She drew up the reins with a still figure and passionless face, still and passionless as if turned into marble.

All the courage that Smith had possessed oozed from him. He threw one long look upon her, gave a piteous wail of misery, heartfelt, hopeless misery, and left her.

Ano'her minute and the sleigh went from him like a whirlwind. Florimel was standing bolt upright, and flogging the ponies like a maniac.

"She is mad, surely mad!" sighed he, helpless and dejected.

A sort of stupor seized upon him. He could not yet realize the blow to its full extent. He walked homewards, staring blankly about him. What had just occurred seemed at one time to have been blotted from his memory, for, as the strains of music fell upon

his ear, he found himself echoing them. "St. Patrick's Day in the Morning!" laughed he vacantly, "ah, yes! that is it, and I am going out of my senses, but who the devil cares? Let me go."



CHAPTER XIII.

SELF-ABNEGATION.

A SICK room; the blinds drawn down; a girl on the bed tossing her arms wildly, and incoherently talking; Mrs. Clarke in great terror and distress attending her; a doctor. Poor Florimel! there she lay, her hair disordered, her swan-like throat bare, her face white as marble, her eyes closed—in delirium.

The physician was a tall man, with an intellectual-looking countenance and bland manners. His patient was to him no more than any other patient, saving that she was exquisitely beautiful, and just now excited in

FLORIMEL JONES.

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his mind some curious speculations as to the cause of her disorder.

"I strongly suspect," muttered he, "that it is an attack of *Erotomania*—just the age and temperament for it—other indications not wanting—yes, that is it—what may be technically called *Erotomania*—must be."

"What did you say, doctor?" inquired Mrs. Clarke, anxiously.

"Nothing, madam—talking to myself a little—making a diagnosis—yes, that must be it," added he, under his breath, "never met with such a distressing case before, though—quite critical—must be kept entirely undisturbed and system quieted down. Ah! I have it."

He sat down and wrote a prescription.

"I need hardly say that your sister's condition is extremely critical just now, Mrs. Clarke. Everything depends upon careful attention and strict quietness. She must see no one—only you and the nurse."



"Oh! tell me, doctor, is she dangerously ill?"

"No, not dangerously, I hope," answered he, with a grave face; "but things wear a serious aspect. Perfect quietness, remember. Good morning."

On his way out the doctor was intercepted by Preston Jones.

"Doctor, my daughter? What do you think?"

His voice trembled and his hands shook; the "Comparative Estimates" were forgotten.

"Well, Mr. Jones, I can't say anything decisive yet. We must trust in God, the great Physician for us all. What state was she in when she came home?"

"Oh! very wild, almost insane, I thought. Mrs. Clarke says that she caught cold driving to Kilbride, and that it must have fastened on her lungs."

"Nothing of the kind, my dear sir, I

assure you. Proceed—she looked wild and—what then?"

"Nothing but hysterics, doctor, nothing but hysterics. It was quite awful to see her. I thought I should have gone into them myself."

"Ah! but you didn't, my dear sir. You and I are not like these young emotional people. A pair of old fogies like you and I have something else to think about, eh? Ha! ha! Well, good day to you. I'll look in again in a couple of hours."

It will be gathered from all this how great the struggle between love and duty must have been, and what Florimel's self-abnegation cost her. She was a girl of the highest moral culture and purity of feeling. Her passion for Smith she could not help; it was her misfortune, not her fault. In common with the rest of humanity she had no safeguard from the irresponsible emotions of the heart? but the controlling of these emotions



and their subjugation when inordinately exercised or unhappily directed it was part of her duty to cultivate. The temptation to give way to the fervour of her passion assailed her in vain. Her agitation and present illness originated in the intensity with which that passion consumed her. But not on that account did a single thought unworthy of a virtuous mind move her. She had not in the slightest degree encouraged any advances from Smith. She did not, after the model of sensational heroines, cast herself into his arms, acknowledge her love, and then romantically bid him leave her for ever. Such a course would have been unworthy her educated sense of propriety and rectitude, of herself indeed. Therefore she did not dally with temptation; she acted at once and decisively, but not without an evidence of the fierce throes of pain that this lofty and chivalrous conduct caused her. She could not control her features; it was hardly to be

expected that one so unpractised in the art of disguising deep emotion could.

It may now be argued that if her immaculate honour was of so elevated a type, why could she not have borne herself bravely to the end, and not succumbed to the overwhelming force of her emotions in the manner described? Ah! dear reader, that is just it. Why couldn't she indeed?

Because, in a word, her passion was too much for her. It must be remembered that was her first love, as a rule the most fervid if not the most lasting of all loves; and she was, as her physician had seen at a glance, of an erotic temperament. What an opening for a novelist to palliate a neglect of duty, to go farther indeed, and exalt passion into something superior to it; something that would throw duty, virtue, and the like into the shade by the side of its grand abandonment of everything high in morals or self-respect, for love of the idolized being for

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whom the victim was to be immolated. But we shall do the character of Florimel no such wrong. She suffered for virtue's sake, not passion's. Hence the stronger the passion, the more glorious the victory.

Assiduously did Mrs. Clarke nurse the invalid. The doctor's injunctions were religiously observed. Florimel recovered slowly but surely. Very thin and greatly prostrated by her illness, she was at length able to leave her room, and sit with her father and sister. How these watched her and waited upon her, anticipating every want, trying every means to restore her to health again! Florimel at the end of a month was able to undertake domestic duties, and cheer her father by her delicate attentions as formerly. Preston Jones grew himself again, and resumed his "Comparative Estimates." Mrs. Clarke, whose mind had been most painfully exercised about Smith (who, to her surprise, had never once called during Florimel's pros-

tration), began to get sentimental again, and to sigh for that gentleman's continual presence as of yore. And Smith!—what about him?

Poor Smith! His rejection at first almost broke him down. It was such a terrible, such an unexpected blow, and Florimel's actions had been so rude and unaccountable! Why have behaved so roughly to him?—and yet again, why have betrayed so much agitation? These questions took possession of his mind for days. He could obtain for them no satisfactory solution. The thing was a riddle—a riddle that he was forced to give up at last with a tearful eye and despondent soul. Florimel did not love him, could not have loved him, and acted so badly, for she had acted badly, this there was no denying. He had done nothing to warrant such positive rudeness from her, he, who had in secret loved her so much. It made his blood boil. His pride came to his rescue.

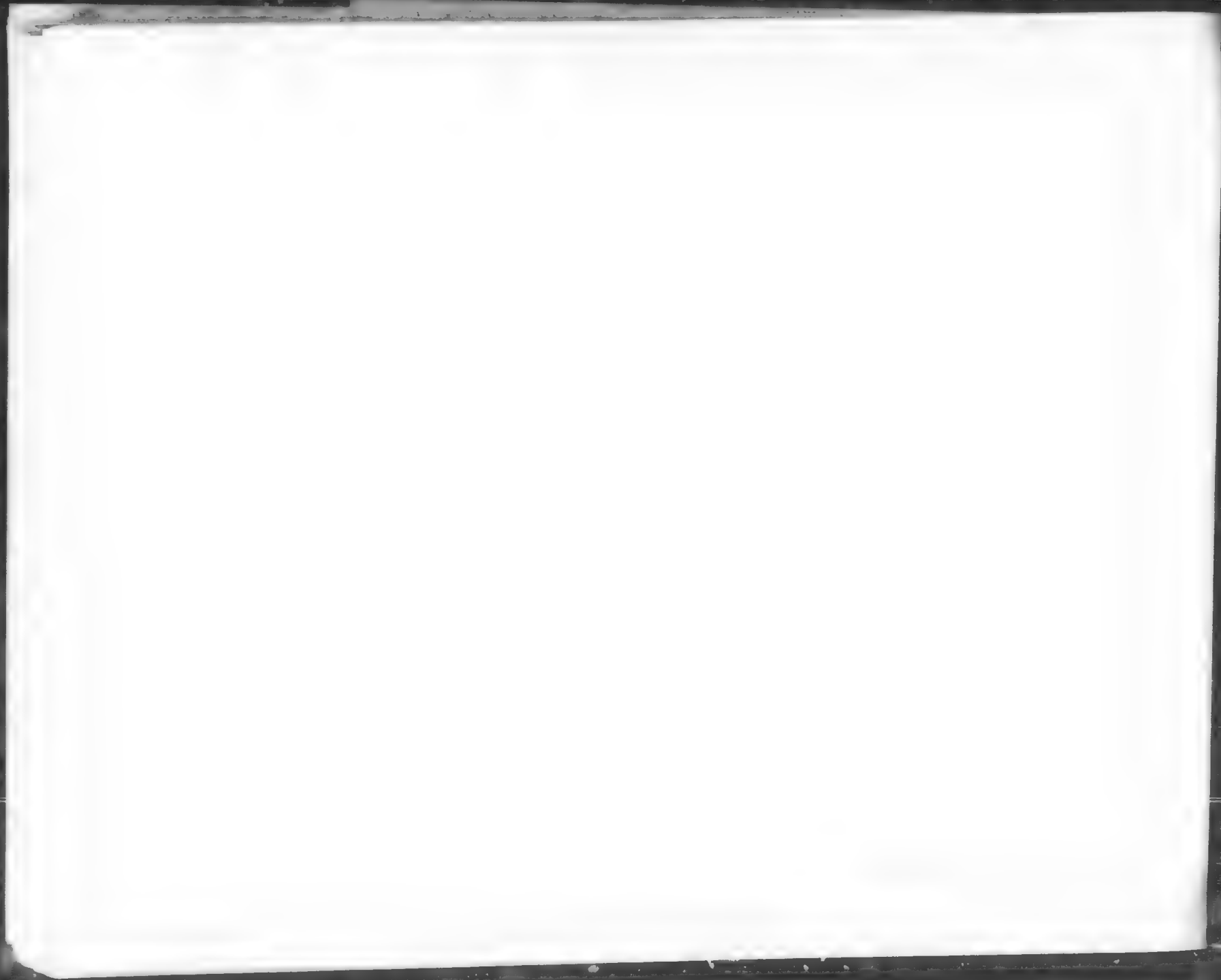


The scales fell from his eyes. She was but a thing of clay, like the rest of them. It was not she that he had loved, but the idol of his fancy.

In this way was the mind of Smith tossed about, day after day, until the thought occurred to him that relief might be obtained by mingling more with the world than formerly, by, in brief, a little dissipation which was to be in no way hurtful, but only sufficient to divert him from his present misery. He acted upon this suggestion, and pertinaciously visited Diderot's Rooms and Sally. His plan of action was, in some respects, a wise one, that is, wise for him. But was it wise for Sally? Alas! no. For her the sequel proved that it was singularly unfortunate. However bravely that little girl might have fought against her rebellious heart whilst Smith was out of sight and forgetful of her, it was utterly impossible, now that she saw him every day, to maintain the

contest with any decent show of propriety. She soon discovered this, and laid down her arms with a helpless sigh. Heigh ho! "O Love, for me thy power!" Here was a fresh victim. Who was to be blamed for it? Heaven or Cupid only knows. Love is a game of blind-man's buff; you grope about with your eyes bandaged and catch the Lord knows who.

Smith consoled himself with the gay prattle and bright smiles of Sally innocently enough. He was a despairing lover, and sought relief from any quarter. Diderot's Rooms stood invitingly open and he entered. Sally Cook was pretty and entertaining, so he amused himself with her. How was he to know that such a piece of waxen beauty had a heart that he ought not to have trifled with, a heart that, like his own, was on the look out for its destiny? Smith did not know all this, nor could his perturbed mind perceive it. He thought only on his own troubles, and

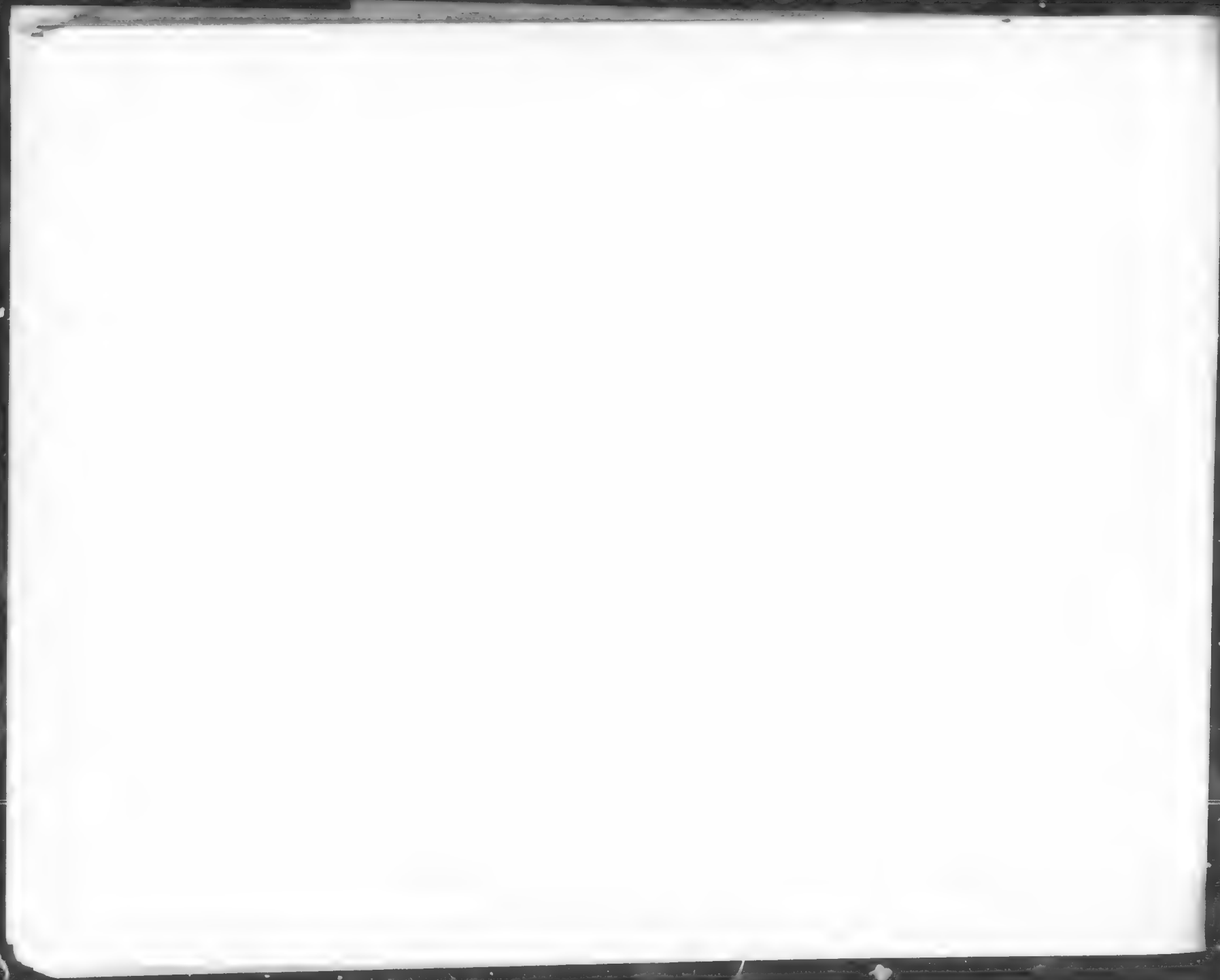


sought a lethean respite from them in the society of Sally and the wine-cup. He laughed and jested like a man lost to the sombre gravities, the sad realities of life. But the laugh was hollow, the jest bitter. Florimel's repulse rankled in his soul, and gnawed into his happiness like an undying worm; so, to obtain a respite, however brief, he had dipped a little into dissipation.

Meanwhile Mrs. Clarke was growing more and more restless concerning that "dear, delightful fellow Smith." How was it that she now never saw him? Villiers, who during Florimel's illness often called to learn how she was, could not satisfy Mrs. Clarke about him. He asserted, with *malice prepense*, that John Smith had given her the slip, and did not care a button for her. Why had she not stuck to him (Villiers), and kept her compact? Smith's defection served her right. This was all the satisfaction Mrs. Clarke derived from that quarter. During the earlier months of

Florimel's malady she had hardly missed Smith at all, so absorbed had she been in nursing her. But now that her sister was convalescent, and did not need so much of her care, her thoughts were more at liberty, and she occupied them with Smith, speculating upon his absence and its cause, and harassing herself daily with doubts about him.

She did not say anything to Florimel about her misgivings. The doctor had ordered his patient to be kept perfectly quiet. Mrs. Clarke rightly concluded that it would be injudicious to broach the subject, and so kept her perplexities and uneasiness to herself. But it was hard not to have some one to confide in! Oh! that the some one could have been Smith himself! Thus Mrs. Clarke suffered in secret, nursing her miseries until she grew heart-sick and pale with hope deferred. And Florimel, with her own grand secret of self-abnegation, watched her as only



such a loving self-sacrificing sister could, and decided that Mrs. Claice was enduring all the pangs of defeated hopes in silence, and that John Smith was for ever lost to them both.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE ROOMS AGAIN.

"VAT you say all true, Mistare Smit, but, *Mon Dieu!* man for all dat von vorm, von reptile, von toad; he crawl vith his head down, nebare look up: man von animal, Mistare Smit, von beast. Darwin call him monkey, me call him vorm. De monkey look up, he soar, he climb tree, de monkey show a bition, but de vorm nebare, de reptile creep alway looking on de ground like man, derefore who is rite, Darwin or Diderot, eh? Ha! Mistare Smit, me surprise you. Nebare mind *Henri dim your two eye, two cock-tail* for me and Mistare Smit. All ve vant now



is pretty girl. Me perceive you no love, Mistare Smith, eh? You von philosopher, no care for de sex. *Mon Dieu!* Diderot adore de voman. She made for de man, made to tend him, to delight him, to love him. It pleasure me to kiss pretty girl and make love. Ha! Mistare Smit, you no heart, no love. Hear vat Béranger say in de bootiful tongue of *ma belle France!* But nevare mind, I vill not say it. You too cold, too English, too systematique—no fire—no noting. Bah!”

“I don’t know about that,” rejoined Smith, laughing at the look of comical disgust exhibited by his garrulous companion, “still water runs deep. I have loved not wisely but too well, I fear, *mon cher ami.*”

“Vat! de philosopher make love? *c’est impossible!*” and the Frenchman threw up his hands.

“It is quite true, I assure you,” said Smith, with a bitter smile.

“Vell! dat is all rite—vat for you no look happy?”

“The pretty girl did not love *me*—that made the difference,” said the love-sick swain, with a contemptuous shrug of the shoulders. Diderot broke into a hearty laugh.

“Ha! ha! Mistare Smit, me perceive—you von dim fool—me mean foolish fellow. You fall in love de rong vay. You break heart for pretty girl. Bah! only fool do dat—plenty pretty girl in de vorld—me have loved ten—twenty—hundred of dem, but no break heart once. Mistare Smit, man am de superior of voman every vay. De voman is made for de man, not man for de voman. Vat for you cry about such bagatelle as frown of pretty girl? Bah!”

Thus the Frenchman rattled on, diverting Smith immensely. Under the genial influence of Diderot’s cock-tails and exuberant animal spirits, he grew more himself again, his mind in a great measure re-



covered its serenity, his physical system its tone. After all, might there not be something reasonable in what Diderot had advanced? Woman was inferior to man physically and mentally. Who could deny that? Why, then, elevate the sex to such a giddy height of adoration? Why indeed? Did it beseech the lords of creation to be guilty of such folly? No. Yet how was it that, century after century, such folly lived, and with time seemed to grow ranker and more offensive in the nostrils of such men as Diderot? Because, ah! Smith's heart was ready with the answer, because there was something about woman that pure inductive reasoning could not cope with, something that was superior to intellect, and soared above it far, far away into the clouds, something that mere mind could not fathom, that might be apprehended indeed by the sublimer senses, but balked the rude grasp of the understanding. Mind and matter, forsooth! Pshaw!

Diderot was a fool, an idiot! There was something more immaterial in nature than Diderot imagined, and it was because woman possessed so much of this nameless something, this sparkle of divinity, that the grosser sex did obeisance to her and acknowledged her power. Could he for one moment, despite the native strength of his mind and body, call himself the superior of Florimel? Ah! no, he knew he could not. A sort of sanctity hedged her in and raised her far above him.

But it has to be acknowledged that Florimel's rejection was a deep wound to his vanity. His pride was hurt. It was one of those blows very hard for a haughty spirit like his to bear. He made love to Sally Cook, especially after Diderot's counsels, most heinously. He paid visits to the Rooms daily, and at an hour when few customers were there to interrupt his amorous inclinations. Gilner was absent. Diderot



smoked his cigar indifferently, or if he betrayed any interest in what was going on, it was by a nod of approval. Under these favouring circumstances Smith won Sally's heart with very little trouble indeed. Not that he for a moment realized the sad havoc of her future happiness that such a conquest meant. She was only a pretty girl to him, and rather a jolly one. She liked him too, and was at no pains to conceal it. This was flattering, for she snubbed most of the young fellows most persistently. But Smith found that he was a privileged being. His arm stole around her waist unrebuffed; he could kiss her red pouting lips as often as he pleased. Wine is a great stimulator of amorous blood. Smith, who, for reasons already known, spared not the vintages of Diderot, said under such influences a great many soft, meaningless things that he ought not to have said, and made love altogether too furiously for a dignified personage sup-

posed to be of a strictly philosophical temperament.

"Ah! Mistare Smit, you von animal too, like all de world. Pretty girl too much for *philosophie*, eh? *Henri dim your two eye*, give Mistare Smit annodder cock-tail."

On Mrs. Clarke, all this time, Smith did not bestow a thought. She supposed that Smith was dying for love of her, but that some malicious slanderer had sown mischief between them, or that she herself had, in some innocent manner, offended him. She attributed his absence to everything but its real cause, which was his love for Florimel and utter indifference to herself. And she fretted and sighed in secret because Smith did not come to her, Smith, for whose slightest comfort she felt ready to lay down her life. Oh! it was cruel! Heaven was unkind to have forgotten her. Husband and child were dead. She had lived so long with nothing to love, and now that her affections

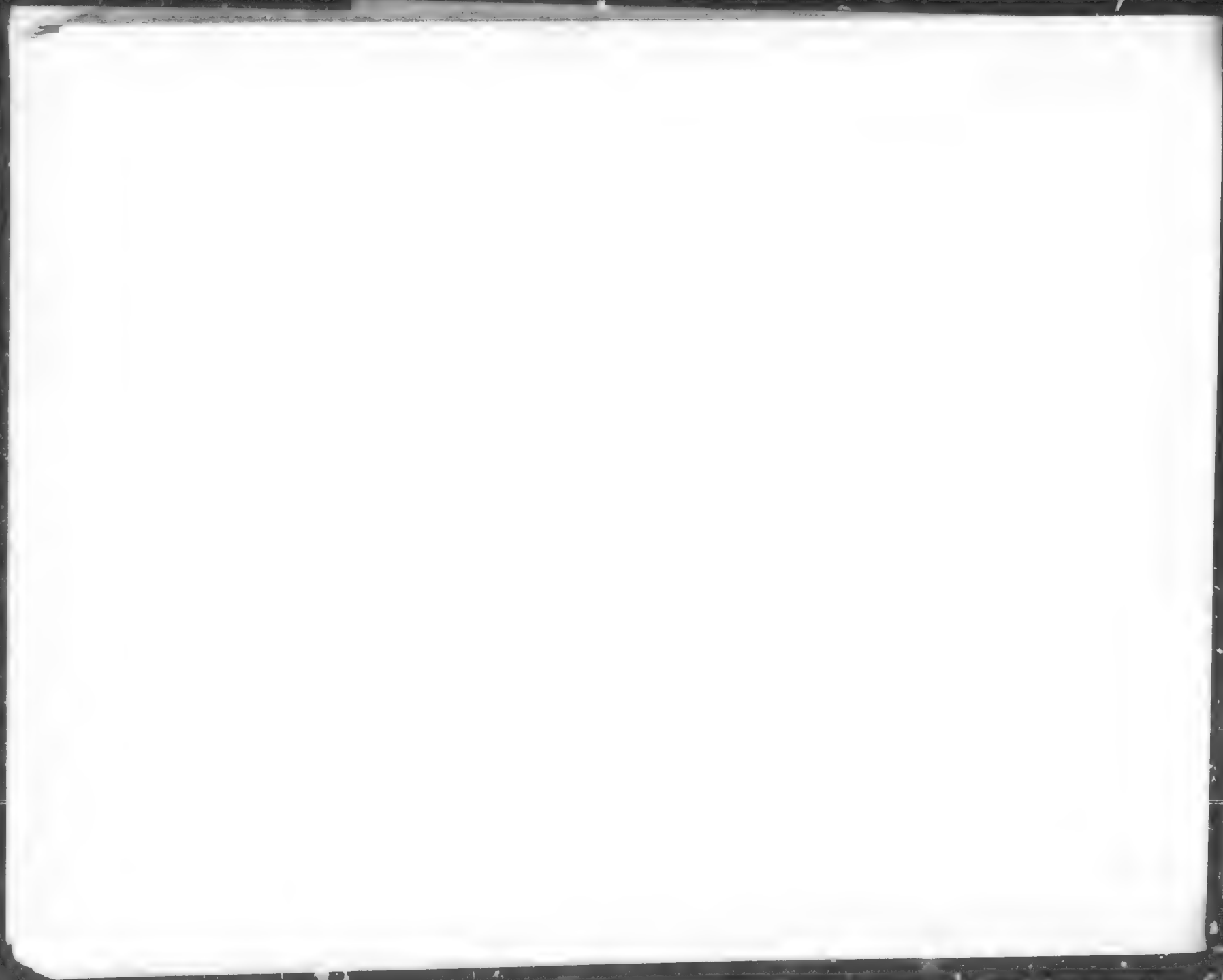


had all gone out from her and fixed themselves upon Smith, her lover grows indifferent and, perhaps, forgets her. Was there any misery in the world equal to hers? She did not think that there could be; and the strong, intensely passionate woman wept tears of distress, bitter, convulsive, agonizing, but serviceable in their way, as they relieved somewhat the burden of her overcharged heart.

CHAPTER XV.

GILNER AND SALLY.

It is time now to pry a little into the love affairs of the young susceptible creatures whose names give a title to this chapter. Since the scene on the door-step things have not worn the cheering aspect for Thomas Gilner that Sally's promises on that occasion warranted. The with pursued her with his idle at more cold she grew to Gilner. plain features had almost grown odious to her. His unremitting zeal in her service was beginning to be wearisome. She could not but reproach herself for this feeling towards a man whose



devotion was still so ardent and persevering. She knew that it was neither just nor reasonable. But when these moments of remorse came upon her she felt herself powerless to repair the evil that she had committed and was still committing. She had not even common sympathy for Gilner. He was a being with whom she felt no identity of interest whatsoever; so that her self-upbraiding was not nearly so keen as it ought to have been. She had commenced by utilizing him, not loving him, how could she now transform the lacquey into the master? Difficult as this feat would have been under even ordinary circumstances, it was doubly so now that so handsome and irresistible a rival as Smith hung about her. Her soul had gone out to Smith, hopelessly, irretrievably; and she did not even struggle to get it back. He could do with her what he liked; she felt that she was his property, his only. Oh! the mad intoxication of his

caresses. How her heart throbbed when he cooed the soft language of amorous passion in her ear! When his lips touched hers in the melting kiss of love, as she deemed it, oh! she could have died that moment, and have died happy! Who is there to censure her for this? Where is the one amongst us who can cast the first stone? Verily, love is a hard task-master. His slaves must obey him. He will be "Lord of all."

Reason, expediency, interest, virtue say, "Do this." But the heart, the abject slave of the tyrant, says, "No, but do *that*." And in ninety-nine cases out of every hundred the heart conquers. Ah! we are helpless creatures when impulse gets hold of us, we of strong passions, that is. As for your cold-blooded, heartless Pharisees, let them enjoy their immunity from these heinous weaknesses of heart, we shall emulate the publican, and, smiting on our breast, plead guilty. Admitting, then, the stern rule of that



occult power in the world to which has been given the name of Impulse, the fickleness of Sally is accounted for and becomes in some degree excusable, and the more so in her case, as she was in the first instance such an unsuspecting victim.

When upon the door-step, as narrated, she had pledged her troth to Gilner so fervently, his passion had in its deep earnestness strangely moved her, so much so, that she half persuaded herself that she really meant to keep her vow. She had felt a vague consciousness at the time that her future was being definitely determined upon, and that she was to be after a little interval of independence altogether Gilner's, his "to love and to cherish," and all the rest of it. But such a prospect she had never for a moment hailed as desirable even from pecuniary motives. And she had secretly decided to play with Gilner, and keep putting off the evil day, as long as she could, by her own

industry, support herself. Then from some, to her, perfectly miraculous cause, Smith, the very man whom she had been secretly adoring, actually makes love to her and looks into her eyes and kisses her lips, and takes her hand with a touch that thrills her. Sally Cook's sense of obligation to Gilner was not proof against this trial of it. She jilted him, jilted him unmistakeably, jilted him without a throe of pity. She was absorbed in Smith. Gilner was in the way. He was bothering her. She was getting to hate the sight of him, with his look of mute suffering and whining entreaties for her to have some compassion, some mercy for him. Mercy indeed! Why couldn't he let her alone, and show some mercy for her, and go away, and leave her altogether to Smith, upon whom she doted? But the poor fool still hung about her, clogging her free movements and persecuting her with his loathsome addresses. Why hadn't he more pride, more

spirit, more pluck? She was getting to despise him; his puerile subserviency was generating in her bosom a feeling of contempt. She had dispensed with his nocturnal escort latterly, had left the Rooms for her lodgings at night unattended, determined to be entirely independent of him, of everybody. But even this had not shaken him off. He sneaked behind at a distance, dogging her to her own door, bound to protect her from molestation at all hazards. Had she been less in love with Smith, such extraordinary devotion must have told upon her, and melted her towards him in spite of herself. But now she looked upon it as unpardonable officiousness, as sheer impudence in fact; and in her heart could almost have cursed him. Nevertheless her sober judgment acknowledged that this thoughtfulness on the part of Gilner was a very necessary safeguard, a sort of precaution that no girl, who had any regard for herself, ought to have omitted.

It is a Sunday afternoon in the early part of April, very bright and inviting. The earth is still covered with a white mantle of snow; the air, pure and serene, seems to have a breathing stillness singularly in accord with the idea of Sabbath repose, of resting from week-day labour, of, in solemn quietness, enjoying sweet, subtle intercourse with nature in the thousand-and-one nameless forms in which she woos the harassed soul to commune with her and be satisfied. But such salutary reflections are thrown away upon the excited inhabitants of Coldwell at this precise moment. The whole town is alive. Don't say a word about subtle communion with Nature. The town has other fish to fry. The past month has been for Coldwell a month pregnant with results. It is the seal-hunting season. The steam sealing fleet left on its perilous voyage in the early part of March, and on this Sunday afternoon one of the steamers is in sight from



the look-out at the mouth of the harbour. Crowds of the townsfolk were wending their way up a steep declivity, on the top of which the look-out building was stationed. The scene was well worthy of a painter's brush. In Newfoundland alone could such a scene be realized. In no other part of the world are the conditions which give the spectacle its prominent features to be obtained.

The hill upon which the spectator stands descends almost perpendicularly into the Atlantic; but no ocean is to be seen; there is nothing but ice. The prospect begins with and is bounded by ice. The eye at first is dazed by the glare of the sun upon so much whiteness. But in the distance the distressed optic suddenly gains temporary relief. A black object is contending with the vast mass of ice obstructing its course, and is coming gradually nearer. It is the steamer, a miracle in the art of ship-building, a vessel constructed expressly to overcome the almost

insuperable difficulties of ice navigation. Propelled by powerful engines, and iron-sheathed from stem to stern, she forces her way along with convulsive bounds, like a thing endowed with life. The multitudes upon the hill watch her motions with breathless interest. The success of the expedition means bread-and-butter for numbers of the poorer folk, and fortunes, perhaps, for those of the richer who have invested their capital in it.

But the commercial interests of Coldwell are without our province; we have for the moment to confine our interest to Gilner and Sally. They encountered each other in the midst of the scene described. Had it been possible, she would have evaded him, but it was too late. He saw her, and fastened on to her like a barnacle. There was a look of terrible resolve about him that she could not fail of observing. His features, even in his happier moods, often wore an expression of



sternness by no means captivating, but now this unpleasant caste to them seemed augmented into absolute ferocity. His face was pale; his teeth clenched. He took her by the hand and withdrew her to a sequestered nook, under a shelving rock, just below the brow of the hill.

"We are unseen here," said he, "and will not be interrupted. You need not be frightened, Sal, I shall not hurt you."

The girl was regarding him with a look of terror. Gilner did not in her eyes seem to be himself. His actions were too wild, and his eyes unusually fierce. She dreaded for a single instant that he might be losing his senses; and shuddered as she perceived how easily he could, if he desired it, hurl her to destruction, as Tarquin was hurled from the Tarpeian Rock. She looked upon the cruel ice-fields such a long way beneath her, and clutched his arm desperately.

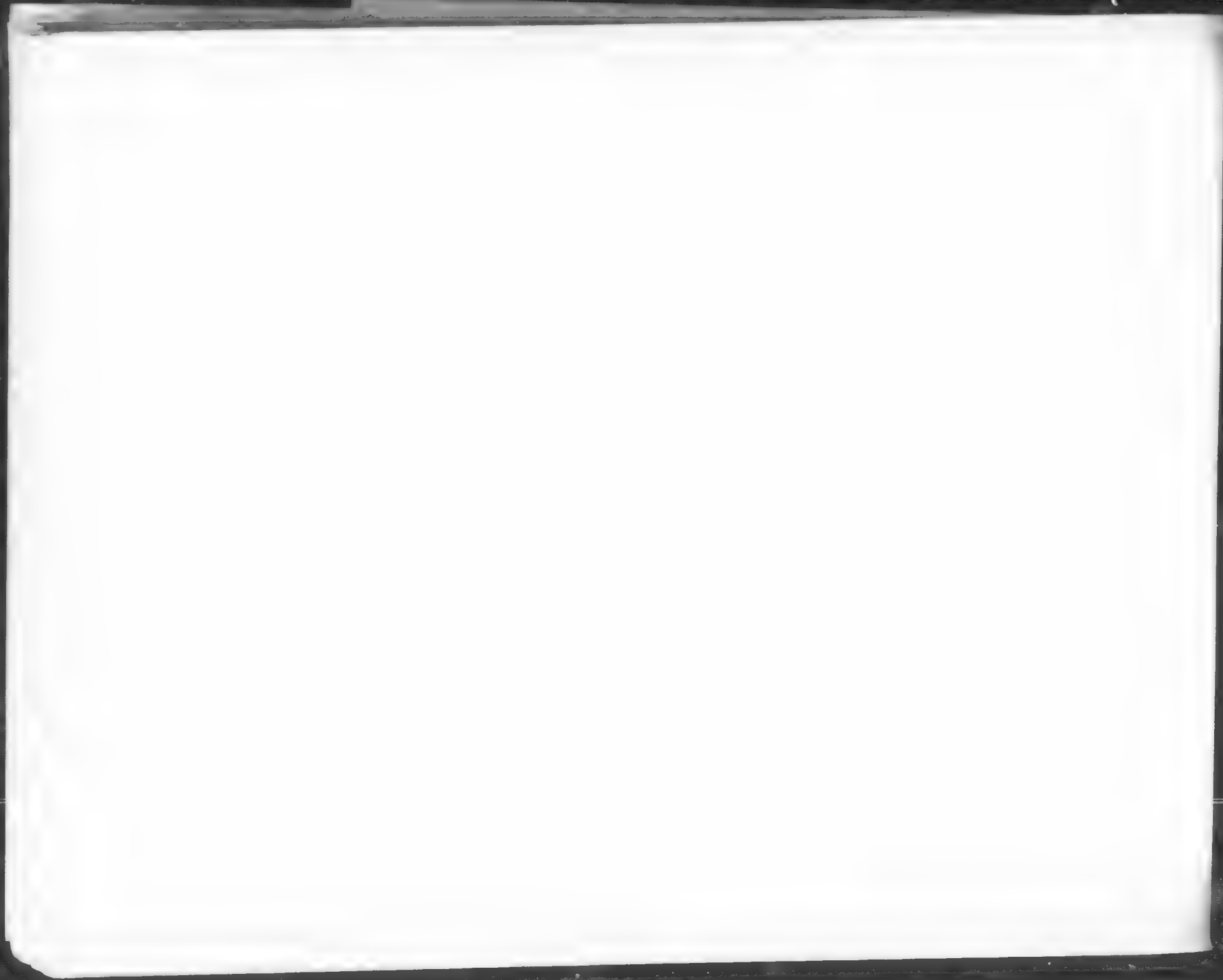
"Let us leave this place, Tom. I don't like it. I am getting nervous."

"Have no fears, Sal," said her lover, bitterly. "I am quite myself, although no doubt I must look somewhat changed, for anguish of soul tells on a man, Sal, in spite of himself."

She grew more assured, but still clung to his arm.

"Sal," resumed he, "I am going to bore you for the last time. Bear with me if I weary you. I don't know that I am doing you or myself any good in thus seeking you out for the last time, but it is a melancholy satisfaction for me to feel that since we have to part, the parting may yet be made in peace."

His tones were tender and sad, but penetrated with a certain music of their own that sank into the soul like gentle, touching harmonies played upon an Æolian harp. The heart of Sally was momentarily affected by them.



"O Tom, why do you keep on loving me so? I don't deserve it—indeed I don't. I have deceived you, Tom. God help me! I begin to see the evil I have done you. Can you forgive me? O Tom, forgive me, and forget me, and let me go. I do not love you, Tom, and I cannot help it. I thought once that I could have brought myself to like you well enough to marry you, but now it is too late. I love another. He has my soul in his keeping, Tom. It is a case of life and death. I could not live without him, Tom. Already, Tom, I fear that the seeds of a fell disease are rooted in my system. The doctor warns me to be careful. He says that I have overworked myself, and have been too careless of my health. Tom, listen. Bend down your head, and let me whisper it. He thinks that I am in consumption, Tom, *consumption*—only think of that!" and the poor girl trembled.

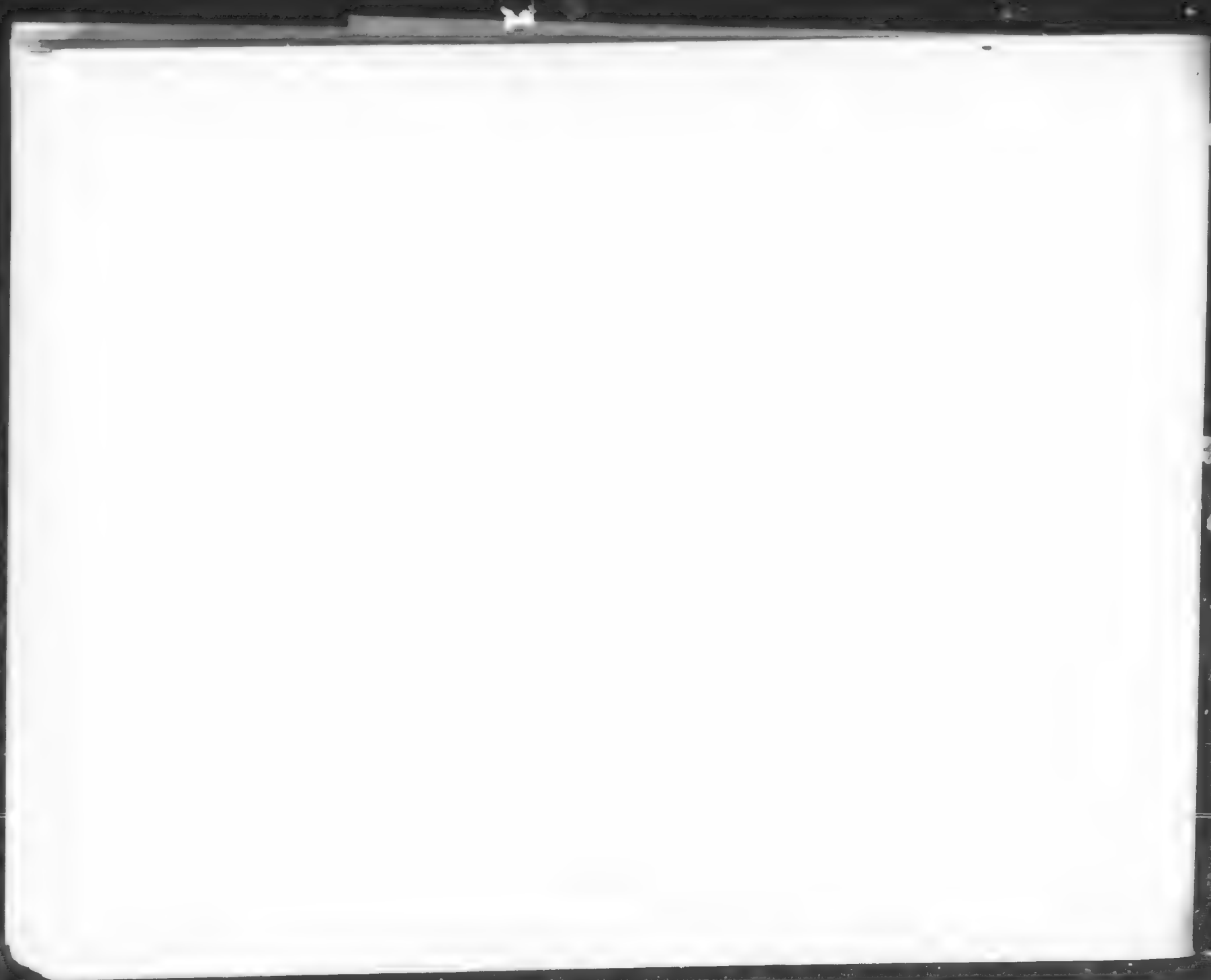
"Nonsense!" said Gilner, turning upon

her quickly, with a searching look; but the look did not reassure him. There were hectic spots upon her cheeks, which, often as he had observed them, assumed under this new light a fatal significance.

"Tom, you are good and generous," she went on, "I know you are, and will forgive me. I have tried to love you, Tom; oh, so hard! but it was not to be. We are not intended for each other. I am not fit for you, Tom, I feel that I am not. I am a sort of waif, an astray, fit for nothing, motherless, fatherless, only fit to die. I have no brother or sister, no kin in the world. Of what use am I? But I love, ah! so much! Tom, there is no help for it. My heart is no longer my own."

She placed her hand upon her bosom, and sighed helplessly.

"There is no need to tell me," said Gilner sadly. "I know it; but a word of caution, Sal," and his voice sank to a whisper, "I



warn you about Mr. Smith. He may be trifling with you. He may betray you. Are you sure that he means you well? Forgive me, Sal, for saying it, but your stations in life are different. He may not mean to marry you."

"Go on, Tom. I deserved this; but you have promised me that it is for the last time. Perhaps," and Sally gave vent to something between a sob and a groan, "what you say may be right. It may be, Tom, that it is a retribution upon me for having deceived you. Go on, Tom; go on."

But Gilner was looking out towards the horizon, his eyes fixed there with a dreamy stare. He was making up his mind by a kind of mechanical effort to say "Good-bye" to Sally for ever, get away from her, far out of sight, and try his fortunes in some foreign land. Arriving at this determination his eyes strayed from the horizon, and rested upon the sealing steamer still pushing on her way

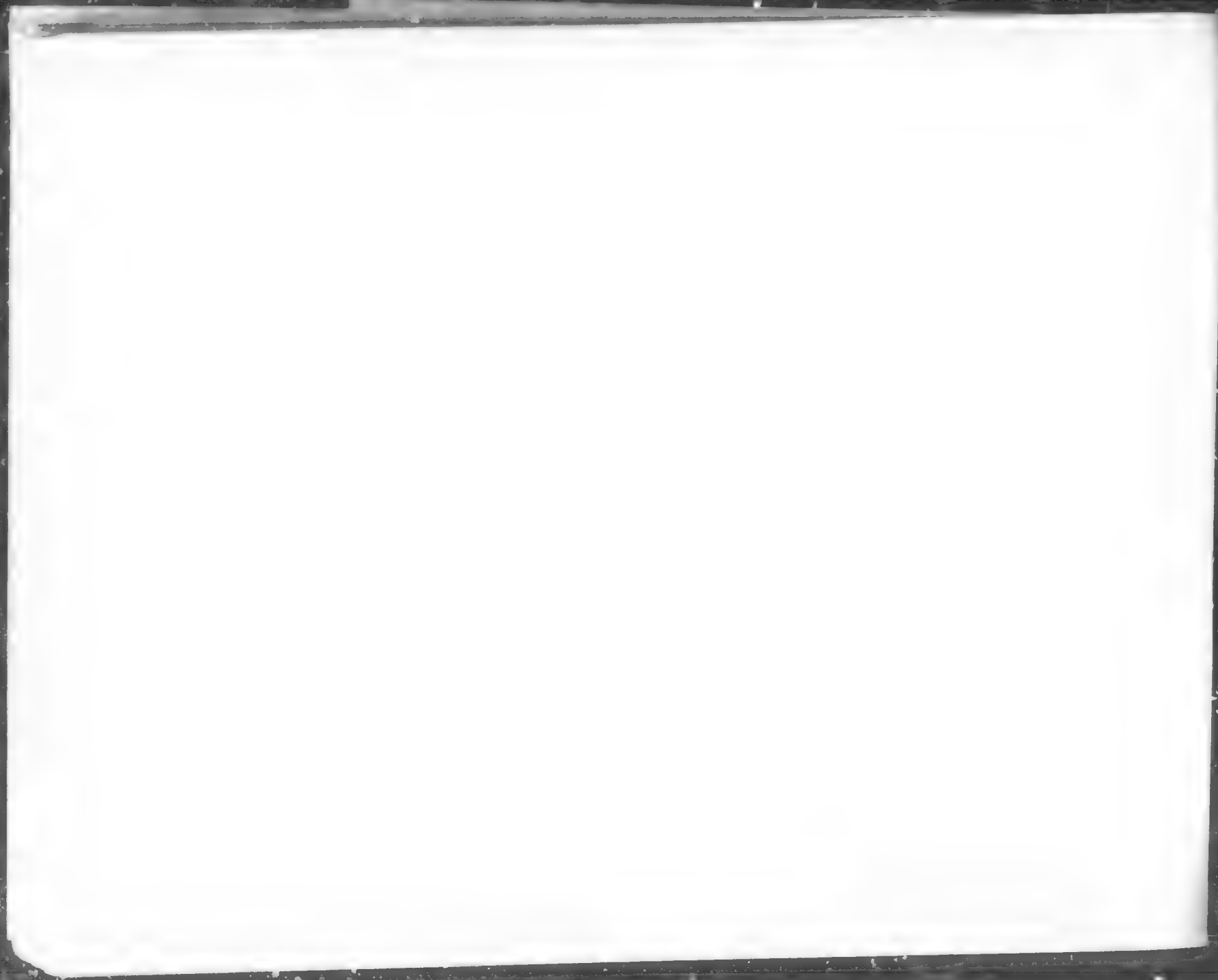
gallantly, her engines throbbing with artificial life, her bow plunging into the ice-fields like a harrow, all her timbers creaking and straining with the labour of her onward progress.

He drew his companion's attention to the spectacle.

"Do you see that, Sal? I was like that struggling ship, fighting against the icy barriers of your indifference, but she will reach port, I *never*. Good-bye, Sal, my first, my last, my only love; good-bye, and God—God bless you!"

She felt a tear fall upon her forehead, followed by a burning kiss. He was a nimble and athletic fellow. By the time she had recovered from her astonishment he had lightly vaulted over the rock above her head, and was out of sight.

Sally stood for a minute or two where he had left her, and then slowly turned her steps homewards.



"Hallo! taking an airing? Let me help you down the hill."

The voice made her tremble with joy. It was Smith's. He soon joined her, and Gilner was forgotten.

Forgotten? Yes, entirely forgotten—forgotten as if she had never known him—forgotten, as if he had never existed.

But, not so very far from her, Gilner hurried away, forgetful of nothing. He did not—could not forget. The past was burnt into his soul. Memory was ever present with him. He could not banish it and forget. Such lethean happiness was impossible. He reached his lonely lodgings, and for hours stared in pitiable wretchedness at the fire, his mind reproducing his recent interview with Sally with pitiless fidelity. It made him moody, sullen, despairing. A cat that he was accustomed to fondle jumped on his lap. He petted her unconsciously. In doing so he must have rubbed against the grain, for she

suddenly turned upon him and drew the blood from his hand.

"Get away, you treacherous beast!" cried he, "you are like a woman. *I stroke you, and you scratch me.*"



CHAPTER XVI.

"AN ANGEL OF LIGHT."

SALLY COOK spoke truly, when she said that her love was a case of life and death. Her passion for Smith, although not deeper than Florimel's, was of a fiercer and more ungovernable sort. She had much greater energy of character than Florimel, with much less moral culture and self-restraint. All this energy of character was employed, not in reducing her passion within manageable bounds, but in increasing its intensity; and her moral tone was of a standard so far below Florimel's, that the glaring sin of her behaviour to Gilner hardly raised in

her breast, as has been seen, any compunction.

There was a wide gulf in point of virtuous excellence between the two girls, and a huge gap yawned betwixt their respective degrees of cultivated sensibility. Nevertheless, passion made them akin to each other; they both loved. Creatures of impulse, and of the age when impulses but too often determine the whole career, they are hardly to be held responsible for the almost supernatural power which these impulses acquired over them. But it behoved them to guard against evils likely to accrue from allowing such impulses to gain the ascendancy. It was in this necessary caution that Florimel so greatly exceeded Sally. The former, only too well aware of the strength of her passion for Smith, made it her study, since she could not change its object, at all events to suppress its outward manifestation, and suffer all the attendant anguish in silence. Sally, equally

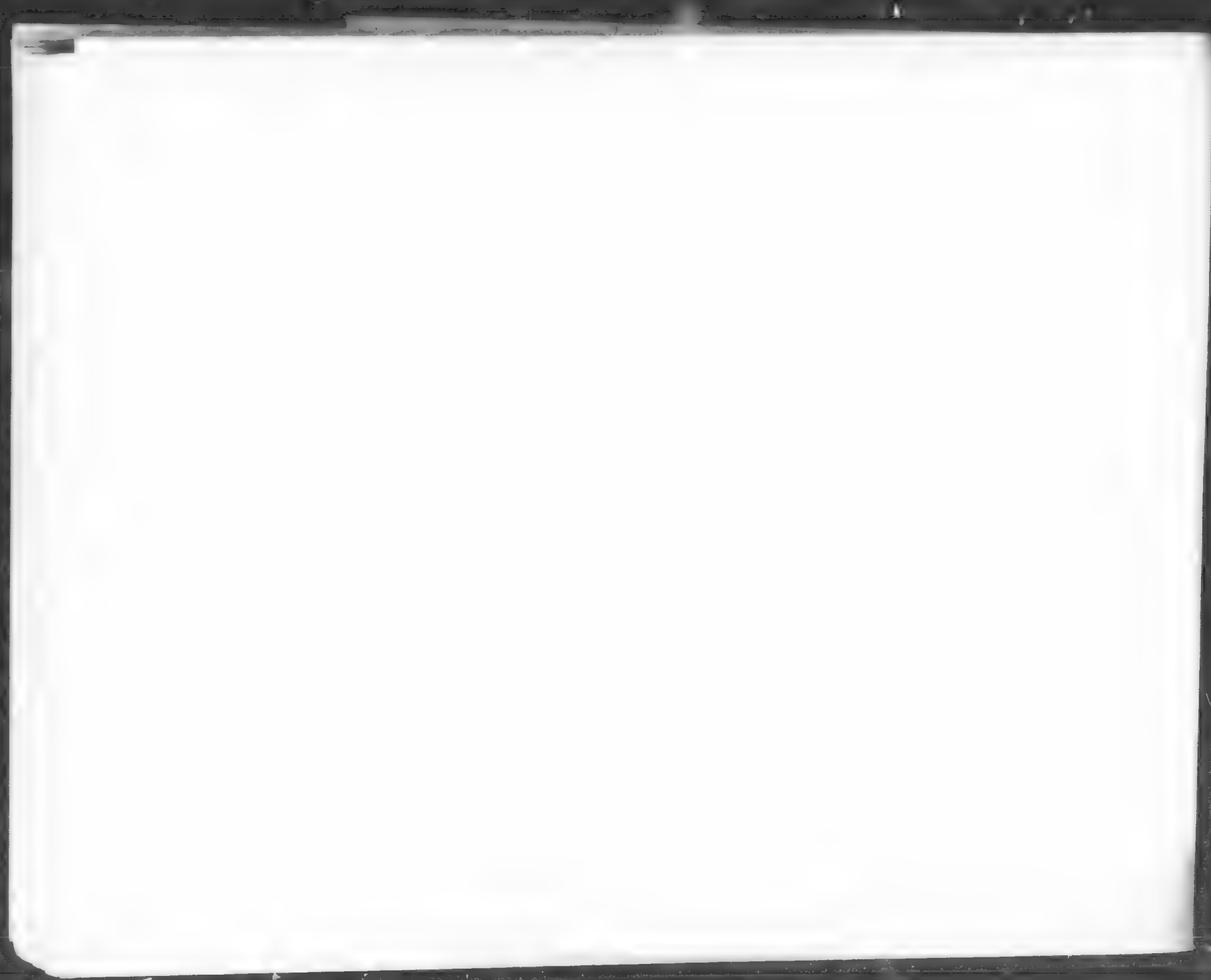


cognisant of the mighty force of the impulse which held her in thrall, neither made any effort to confine the secret to her own breast, nor to curtail its power. The poor girl was conscious at times, when not blinded by the fervour of passion, of the unlikelihood of Smith's ever being anything more to her than a mere gallant, or an admirer of very doubtful service at the best; but for all this, she clung to her reed of hope with the tenacity of despair. He *might* marry her,—perhaps Gilner's sinister hints were but the suggestions of jealousy.

Let us now leave Sally, and look after an estimable personage of whom we have been lately unpardonably neglectful. Edward Villiers still enacted the rôle of "An Angel of light." But such an unusual exercise of self-restraint was beginning to grow irksome. It did not suit him at all; and what made it the more disgusting was the fact that it did not seem to further his plans with regard to

Florimel one iota. She was not infatuated with him, strange to say. All his graceful ease and polite attentions, embellished with a plentiful lacquer of fine sentiment, seemed thrown away. Even Mrs. Clarke wondered at the indifference Florimel displayed for this vain but handsome peacock, transformed, for the moment, into a bird of paradise. Villiers was secretly nettled at it, but all the more determined upon that very account to conquer her coldness, and win her to himself. The idea of such a conquest being at all Utopian never entered his head.

He called regularly during Florimel's illness, and evinced the most tender commiseration for her. Old Jones, wrung to the heart with fears for his daughter's life, was inexpressibly comforted by his visits. Villiers invariably showed so much sympathy for his distress, and seemed to apprehend the state of paternal feelings so thoroughly, that the old man was enchanted with him, and looked



for his morning call quite anxiously. Being a shrewd old gentleman, he thought that such attentions on the part of Villiers indicated something more than mere sympathy, and he began to take into consideration the prospect of soon having a son-in-law, for he was assured that these regular visits of Villiers meant something of that sort. The prospect did not displease him. Villiers was the nephew and sole heir of "Auld" Sandy Campbell, his partner. It was true that he did not bear the most unsullied of private characters. His youthful escapades had been legion, and his extravagance unbounded. But marriage might put an end to it all. His blood was getting cooler; his judgment more sobered. Jones himself, in earlier days, had had his fling, only much more cautiously, and without the reckless prodigality which up to this time had marked the career of Villiers. He knew by experience what young men, especially young unmarried men, were, and

was ready to make allowances; but of course, if proposals were made to him for his daughter's hand, he would stipulate for reformation. Then there was the large fortune of his partner in the scale, and the additional link of mutual interest which such an event as the marriage of Florimel with Villiers would form. Moreover, if this alliance was consummated, Villiers could be provided for at once, by being taken into partnership with Campbell Jones and Co. The old gentleman, after planning out the future settlement of his daughter in this way, would rub his hands, and drop reading his "Comparative Estimates" for a while, and receive Villiers with incipient paternal fondness; and the more he revolved the scheme in his busy, calculating brain, the more convinced he became that such an arrangement was the best one possible for all parties.

When Florimel had recovered, he noted with feelings of gratification the assiduous atten-



tions of Villiers, and the unexceptionable decorum of manner with which such attentions were stamped.

Villiers rose in his estimation at once. Perhaps the desired reformation had been begun already.

But now that the idea of Villiers' connexion with his family had taken root, it grew upon him, and was watered and nourished by a secret pleasure in the contemplation of it, and got finally to be the darling wish of his heart.

The indifference of Florimel to the addresses of Villiers he did not regard as any obstacle to his plans. She was no doubt naturally coy and reserved, and too young to know the value of such addresses, or the degree of warmth with which to receive them, even if she did. He must consult with Mrs. Clarke, and get her to tutor Florimel as to what she ought to do.

To the profound astonishment of Mrs.

Clarke, he consulted her upon the subject, and quite electrified that lady by the ardour with which he propounded his scheme.

"But, dearest papa, Mr. Villiers has been so dissolute! He would never suit a girl of such purity as Florimel. I feel sure that it would never do. It would only result in unhappiness for her. Besides, papa, I don't think that Mr. Villiers has any intentions with regard to Florimel. He is amusing himself, that is all. I know him too well."

"No, you don't know him at all, my dear," said her obstinate parent, with a confident wink; "he is in earnest, my dear, and, between you and me, behaving very well. He has been a little gay, my dear, I admit, but he has sown his wild oats, and, in my opinion, will be all the better man for having sown them so early. In a word, my dear, all things considered, I think that Villiers will be a capital match for Florimel. In confidence, Marion, I may as well tell you that, if he marries her,



Auld Sandy and I will take him into partnership."

Mrs. Clarke shook her head. "I am convinced that you misinterpret the attentions of Mr. Villiers. Let Florimel take her chance of getting a husband better suited for her, dearest papa."

"Ah! that is all very well," replied he; "but a bird in hand, Marion, is worth two in the bush. By the way, what has become of Smith? A capital match for Florimel he'd make! But there, he is a bird in the bush. There is no use talking about him, although I fancied at one time he was after you, Marion, eh? Ha! ha! I thought so."

Mrs. Clarke was blushing.

"Look here!" cried old Jones in enthusiasm, putting his hand on his daughter's shoulder, "you make sure of Smith, and leave Villiers to Florimel."

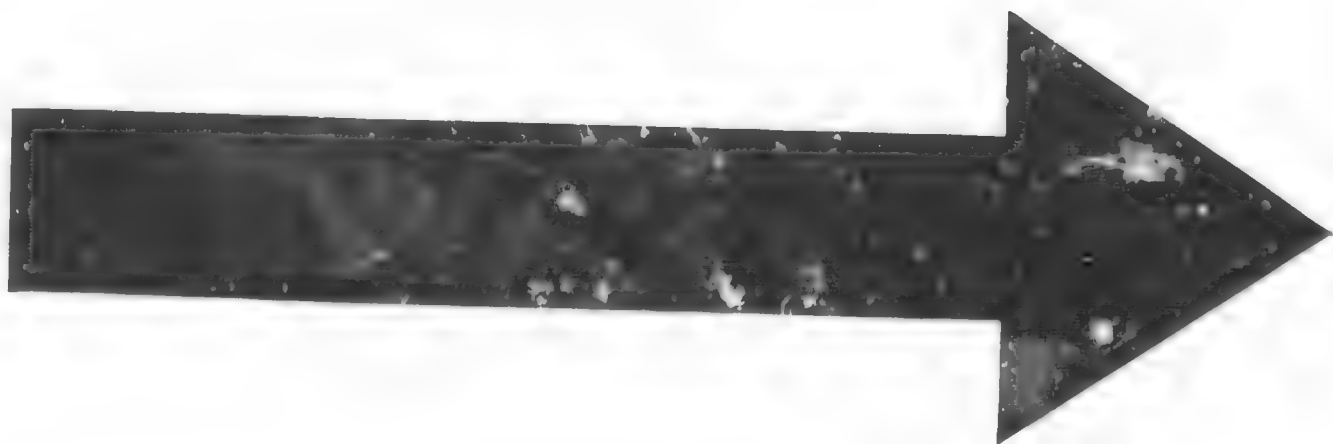
Very shortly afterwards, as if to promote the old gentleman's plans, Villiers called, and

was received by him with overflowing cordiality. Preston Jones contrived to withdraw Mrs. Clarke from the room, and, Florimel being present, thus left the supposed lovers alone.

But his manœuvring was executed after such a blundering, male fashion, that his guest had little difficulty in comprehending the drift of it.

"Egad!" observed the gay Lovelace, under his breath, "the old flick wants me to make up to his daughter, and curse me if I don't do it. There will be money here too, and my exchequer's exhausted. "Miss Jones," pursued he, in a louder tone, "we are left to what I hope will prove a delightful *tête-à-tête*. I trust that your seat by the window is not too much exposed. Will you let me dispose of you more comfortably upon this sofa by the fire?"

Florimel looked at him and shook her head decidedly. She was very well where she was,



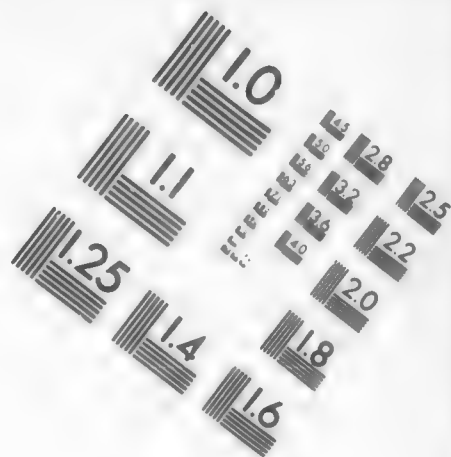
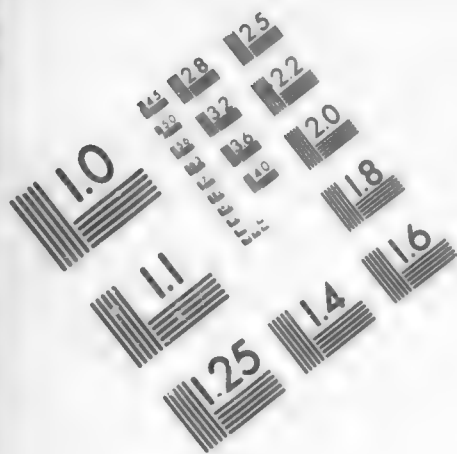
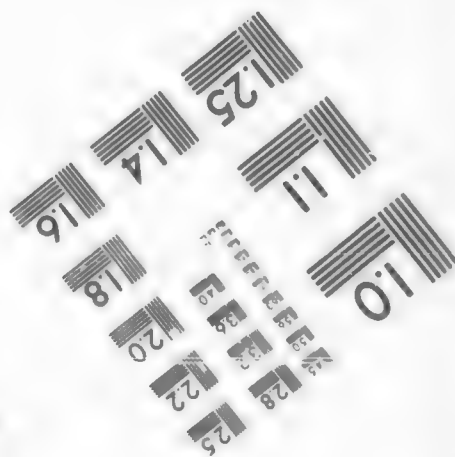
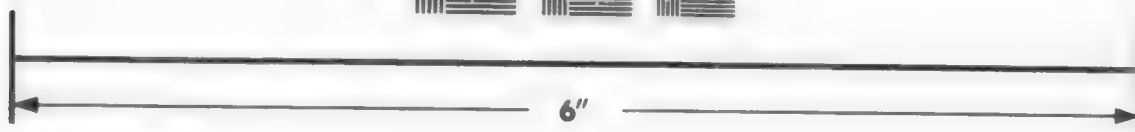
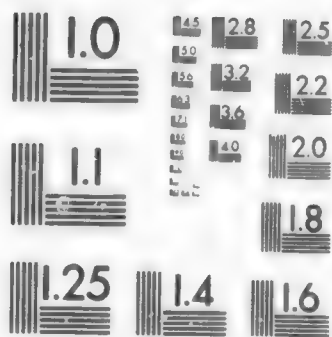


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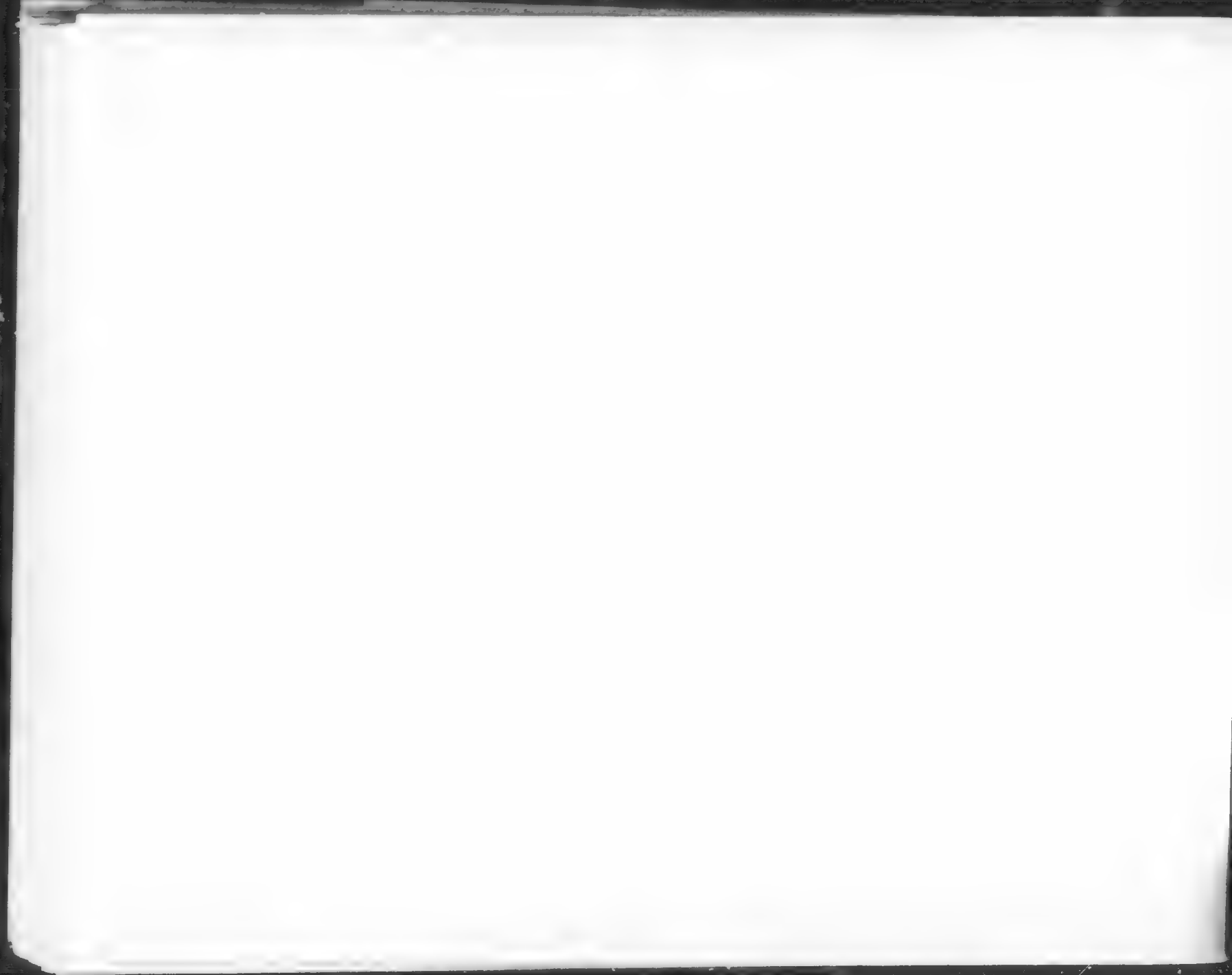


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thanks to him; he was very kind, and so forth.

He drew a chair alongside of her, with a show of great familiarity.

She did not even look at him while he did so, but gazed listlessly out of the window, thinking of nothing in particular, and absolutely forgetful for the moment of his presence. It was not a very auspicious opening for a proposal of marriage; but Villiers felt sufficient confidence from deductions based upon the conduct of old Jones to make the attempt.

"Miss Jones," began the reckless spendthrift; "Ahem! Miss Jones."

She was still looking out of the window, paying no heed to him.

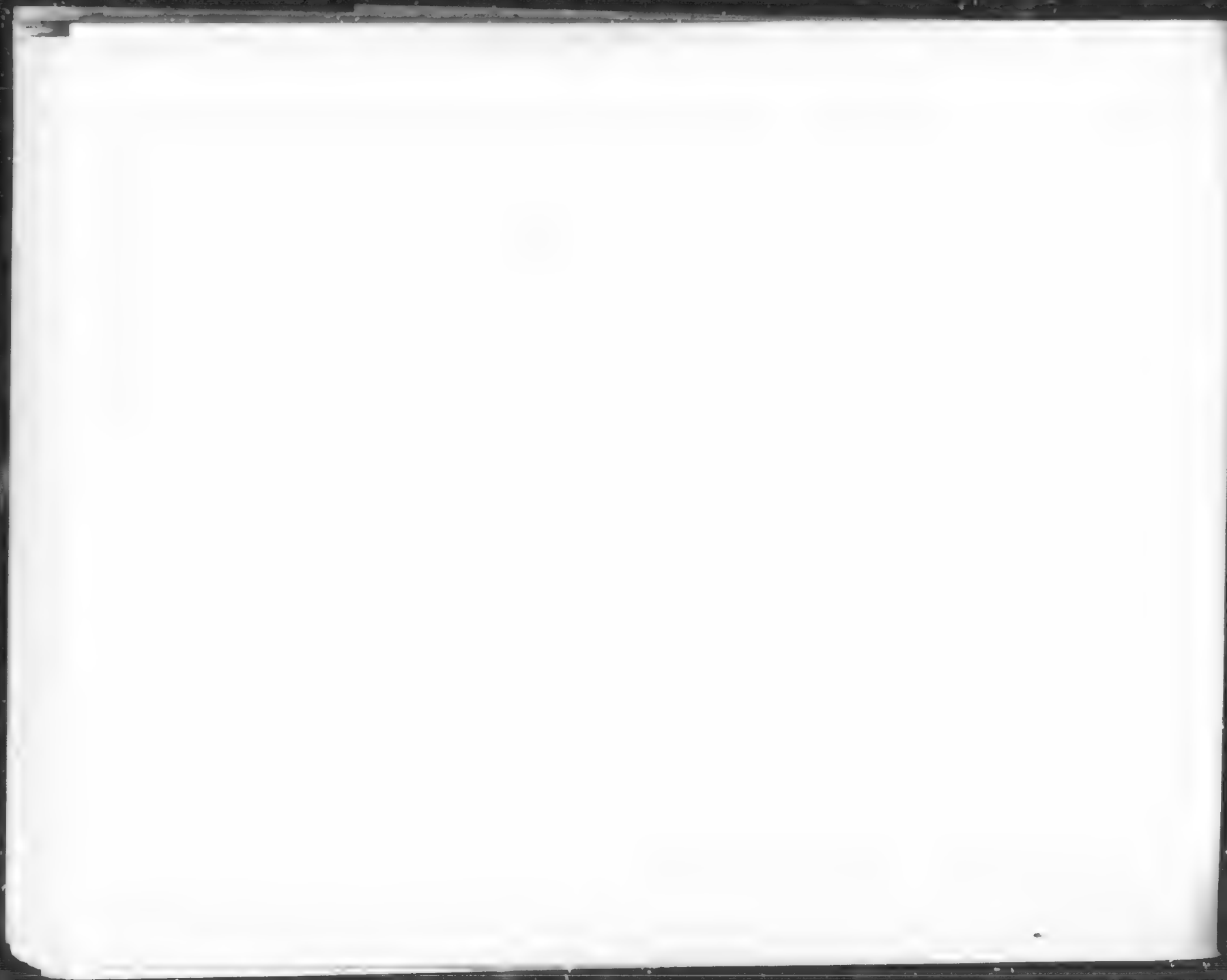
He took her hand tenderly and pressed it.

She turned and looked at him in mute wonder.

"Did you say anything, Mr. Villiers? I am so sorry. I beg your pardon."

"I did speak, my angel," said he, in a voice which he flattered himself was ravishingly thrilling; "I am compelled to speak, dearest. My feelings, I assure you, can no longer be repressed. They manifest themselves too plainly. Everybody sees them. He who runs may read. Your good father only this moment gave me this delicious opportunity to declare them, unrequested. How patent to the world, then, must be the state of my heart! But what do I say? *My* heart? No, my idol, my angel, it is *your* heart. Miss Jones—Florimel—I love you; need I say more? I love you."

The girl looked at him for a moment perfectly amazed. Could this man be in earnest? Could any man be in earnest and talk upon, to her mind, such a sacred subject as love, in the glib tones and with the unimpassioned air that Villiers did? She involuntarily thought of Smith's declaration and the burning language in which that had been cou-



veyed, and his excited, earnest gestures. The contrast moved her, and she felt her heart throb with suppressed anguish. Oh! the sickening remembrance of that scene; it made her feel faint.

"Mr. Villiers, I am sorry to trouble you, but I still feel very weak—a—a—glass of wine, please."

"Oh, certainly," cried the gentleman; "delighted, I assure you. That's it—don't be afraid of it. Do you feel better?"

Villiers had poured out the wine promptly, with the mental observation that she was the deuce of a rum girl, anyhow. Nervous, he supposed,—he was too much for her. The ecstasy of the thing was too much. He must tone himself down, and so forth, or the deuce could tell what might happen. He must drop poetry and take to prose.

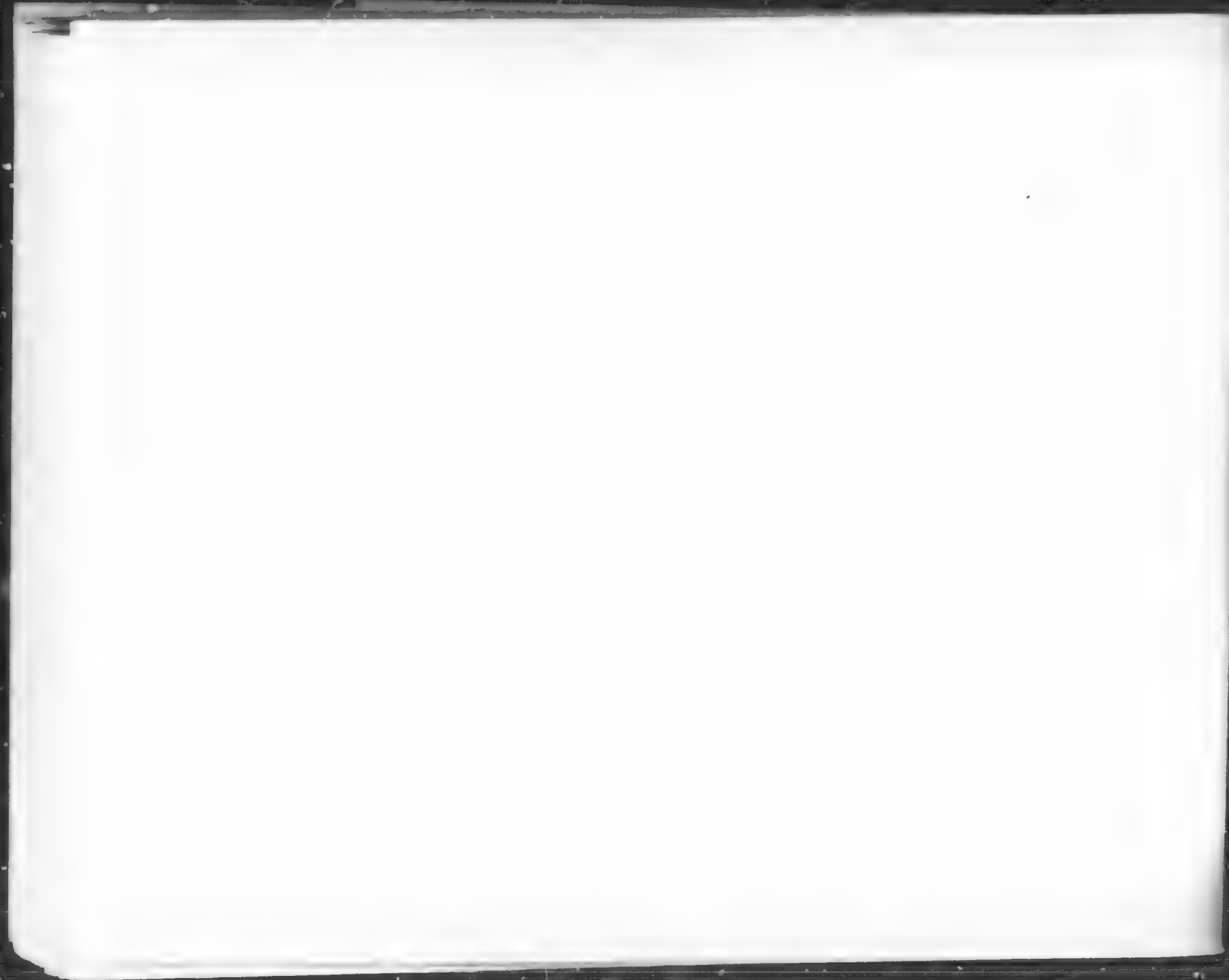
"To recur to my subject, Miss Jones," resumed he, in practical tones; "having informed you of the state of my heart, I may as

well come to the point at once and ask your acceptance of it; you take what I mean, of course? I have no doubt we shall lead a very happy life together, dove-like, and so forth. I am not an exacting man by any means, so that you will have pretty much your own way, and will be able to do as you like. There's not many fellows would care to do this sort of thing, but I don't believe in tying a wife up too tightly. I go in for personal freedom in these affairs. With regard to other necessary arrangements, I think that—"

"Stop, Mr. Villiers," interposed Florimel; "what am I to understand by all this? Is it in plain words that you want me to marry you?"

"Egad! you've hit it. That's the very thing I am dying for; you can't name a day too early. Florimel, dearest, one kiss—only one; nay, but one sweet little kiss to seal our vows."

He struggled to embrace her.



"Mr. Villiers!" cried the girl, springing to her feet, "this insult is unpardonable. Your language was impertinent enough, but your conduct, sir, is a deliberate insult."

Villiers drew back in astonishment. She levelled at him a glance of living scorn that stung him into fury. There was a striking resemblance between Florimel and Mrs. Clarke now, which indignation had thrown into her lineaments. Villiers could almost fancy that it was indeed Mrs. Clarke who was before him.

"Enough, Miss Jones," said he, gnawing his lips in impotent passion. "I shall not forget this. You women don't know when a real compliment is paid you. No doubt you have been schooled by your sister into this folly. You can say to her that I'll remember *her* too. Ah! you needn't ring—I can find my way out."

"D——n her," growled the defeated adventurer, when safely outside the house and

out of hearing; "I'll crush her before I've done. I'll crush them both. It is that infernal Mrs. Clarke, that she-devil, that has put her up to this; but I'll be even with her yet. Hang it! I must be even with her. This angel-of-light business is not played out yet. Hullo! what have you got there?"

He was not far from his own door by this time, and thus accosted a postman who was about to knock there. The man gave him a letter and departed. It bore a foreign postmark. Villiers sprang the envelope hastily. "By ——," hissed he savagely; "I'm undone now and no mistake; it's from Edith. She's unearthed me at last."

The letter was from his *wife*, and dated at Plainfield, New Jersey. It was a letter servile and upbraiding by turns. She reproached him with his heartless desertion of her, and entreated him to think of their child, soon, she said, to be left an orphan, for her strength

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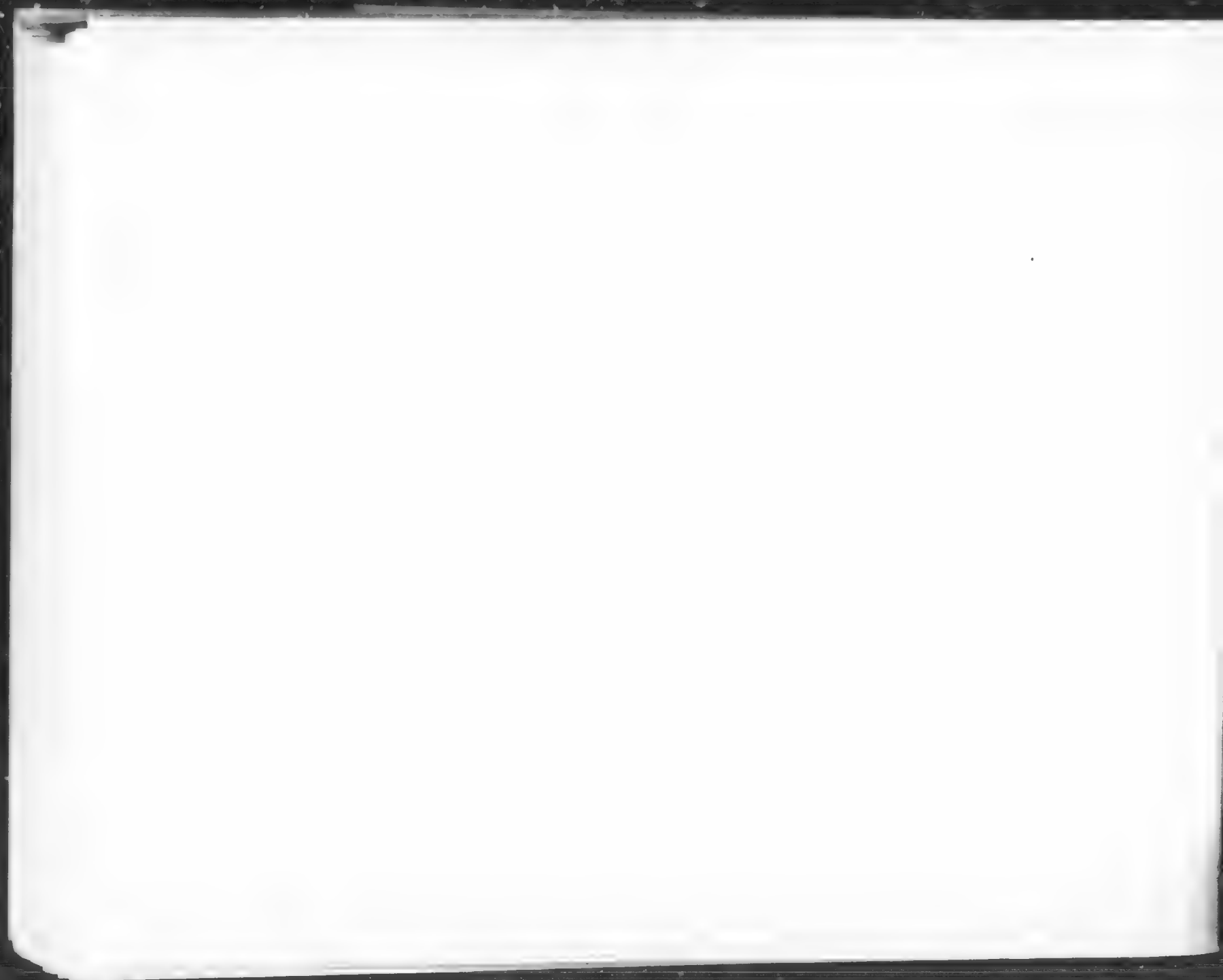


was going out at last, and she felt that her days were numbered. It was a letter full of pathos and a certain wild eloquence, the eloquence of despair.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MASK FALLS.

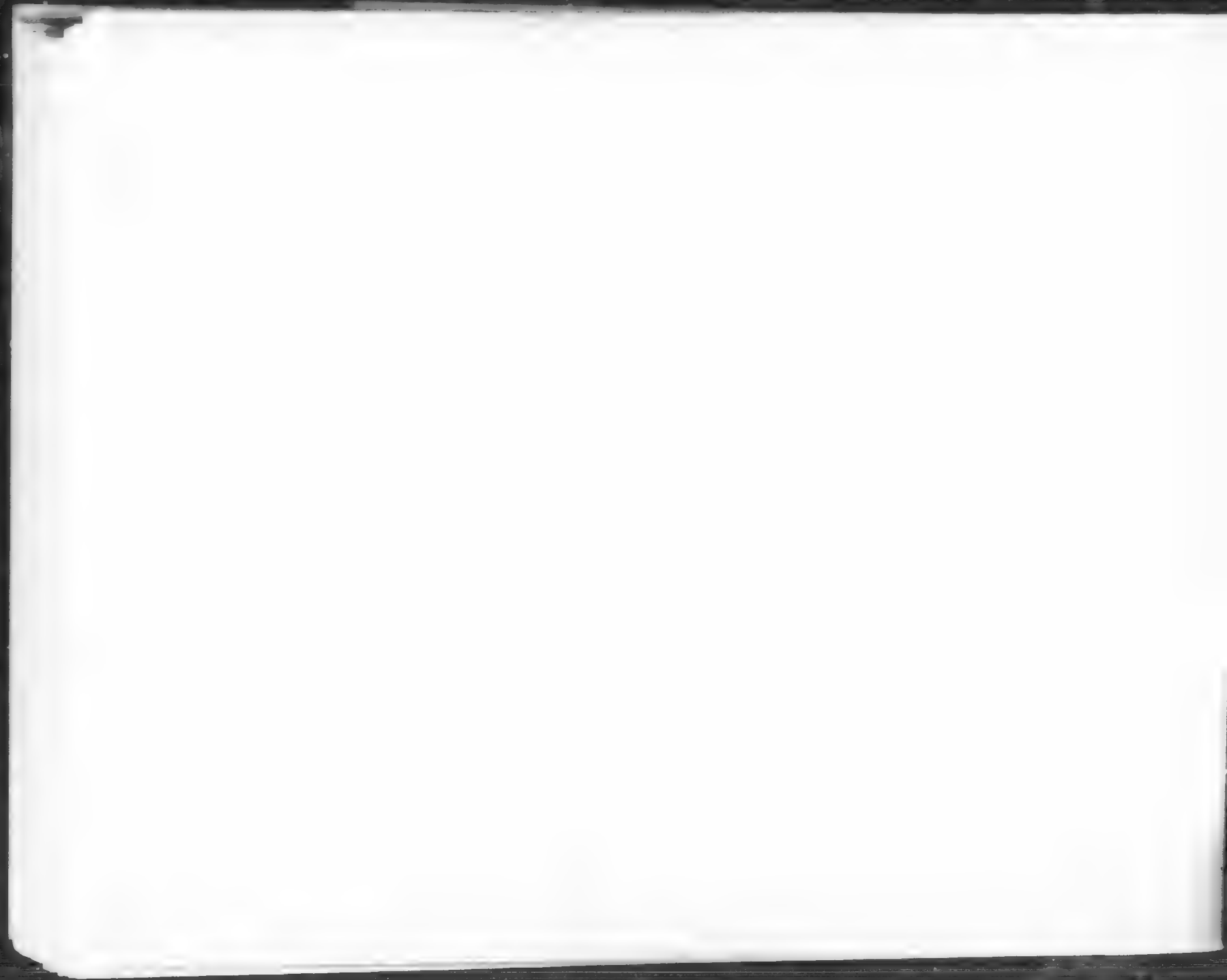
VILLIERS, with a bitter imprecation, crushed the letter in his hand. He stood for some moments rooted to the ground. This unexpected blow paralyzed him. He was stunned, bewildered, overwhelmed by it; he could not think, he could only feel that he was utterly undone. It would be impossible to conceal any longer from the world his real situation. He was lost. If he had only money to purchase silence, he might yet be able to suppress the knowledge that he was already married. He might relieve the immediate necessities of his wife and keep his



child out of sight. His designs with regard to Florimel might be again pursued, and his social position saved from irretrievable disgrace. But without money he was helpless; a mere straw blown about by the wind. All the efforts of his wife would be directed towards reaching him for the sake of their child. How was he to prevent the disclosure which such efforts must cause? Already, perhaps, she was in communication with some lawyer of the place, and secrecy was at an end. How else account for her thus ferreting him out? He had married her under the name of Edward Forbes, and taken every precaution in deserting her to leave no clue to his movements. How, then, had she discovered his whereabouts, and identified him with such unerring instinct under his real name? He remembered an advertisement soliciting information regarding a certain Edward Forbes that he had seen in Smith's chambers. Could that lawyer have aided in undoing him? He

was uncertain about it. Smith had nothing to go upon but conjecture. Villiers had never breathed a word to a living soul about his marriage. Smith knew of his having lived for a little time at Plainfield though, and there was a possibility that on speculation he might have answered the advertisement and ascertained all the truth. If he, Villiers, ever discovered that such was the case, he would murder Smith, if he was to be hanged for it.

After the first moments of confusion, these were the thoughts of the now doubly defeated villain. He entered his house and called peremptorily for spirits and water. He drank freely, a rare thing for Villiers to do, habitually a cautious man in the case of stimulants; cautious, because he dreaded, by some indiscreet admission when under such influence, that he might compromise himself and put himself in the power of others. For many and important reasons he preferred to always keep his wits about him. But on the



present occasion his ordinary caution deserted him. He endeavoured to deaden the keenness of his sensibilities by frequent recourse to the bottle.

Villiers, some of whose infamous intrigues were as well known as he was himself, had always contrived to retain a good hold upon the regard of society. He was held by the one sex to be an agreeable, handsome man, whose powers of fascination served to cover a multitude of sins; by the other, to be an open-handed, generous fellow, ready for any scheme that had pleasure for its object, and bent upon drinking as deep a draught from Circe's cup as might be enjoyed short of absolute satiety. A man of pleasure is always well received in the world, so long as he retains the means of pleasure, *money*, at his command. Villiers knew this, and was right in concluding that the worst feature in his case was the want of cash. A little money would set everything right. But how pro-

cure it? There was the rub. He could not borrow, his credit had been exhausted long ago. He could not even "float a bill." So many of his bills were at that moment floating about, that there was little chance of the ocean of human credulity floating any more for him. He had no personal security upon which to raise a single dollar. The bulk of his wardrobe was at the pawn-shop. He could not strip himself, and face society as a naked man. He must be still Villiers, the gay, the handsome, the fascinating Villiers,—

"The glass of fashion and the mould of form."

A vain man, his personal appearance was the first consideration. He must still preserve externals; his watch chain dangled from his watch fob, although the watch itself was in pledge.

Villiers tortured his invention in vain. He could hit upon no scheme by which to replenish his empty purse, no scheme but one, and that was dishonour. He gave a gentle-



manly shudder at it, and muttered doubtfully, "It won't do." But the temptation kept recurring; the idea grew familiar to his mind; by degrees it became divested of its enormity; stern necessity goaded him on; no alternative presented itself; he shrugged his shoulders, with a reckless, devil-may-care air, and determined to become a forger. If cleverly executed, a forgery upon Campbell, Jones and Co. would free him of all his embarrassments and enable him to follow up Florimel, when, if successful in that quarter, the means of concealing the fraud would be almost at once put into his hands.

In the midst of these meditations the servant entered to lay the cloth for dinner. He bade her desist. He would not dine at home on that day. She could replenish the bottle and leave him. Three hours afterwards she made some pretext upon which to enter the apartment and found her master still gazing into the fire, with the bottle nearly empty.

She suggested the subject of dinner again. He had eaten nothing, she said. "Egad! I had nearly forgotten it," he answered with a bibulous chuckle. "But it is not too late, my Ganymede. Get me some now—and see here—I want you."

She came towards him. He caught her by the arm and kissed her hotly. She giggled and freed herself.

"Law! how could you?" cried she aloud. "Master's beastly drunk," was her inward comment.

When she brought in the dinner he made renewed efforts of an amorous sort. But she escaped him. He sat down and began eating. He was not blindly intoxicated. He ate heartily and drank a great deal of water. His habitual wariness of mind apprised him that he was on the verge of inebriety.

He got up and paced the room. He did not walk very steadily, and soon detected it.



"Curse the stuff!" muttered he, "I must get sober someway. I'm half drunk."

He staggered to the sofa. He stretched himself upon it with indifferent skill, and was soon breathing stentoriously.

When he awoke he discovered that the girl had thrown a shawl over him, that the lamp was lighted, that it was eleven o'clock.

He arose and shook himself comparatively sober. So sober did he feel that he took another glass of brandy to keep off the chill that was creeping about him, and felt revived by it.

"Hah!" cried he, "I am all right again, and ready for anything, by Jove! Eleven, eh? Egad! I must get a mouthful of fresh air, and see what the night has in store for me. I must turn over these pecuniary complications of mine, too. Egad! I feel equal to anything. Forgery? Ay, and murder for that matter. If I come across that Smith, I'd

be the death of him!" He put on his hat, lit his cigar, and walked out.

It was one of the fine, starlight nights common in Newfoundland at this season. The air was just cool enough to make exercise enjoyable. Villiers felt a glow of heat permeating his whole frame and tingling in his fingers as he walked. If he had been given to admiration of the picturesque, he would have been struck by the quiet beauty of the scene. The moonbeams tinted all objects upon which they fell with a mellowed radiance, the dark roofs of the houses, the snowy landscape, the still waters of the harbour. The Block-House upon the top of the hill, where had been signalled the sealing steamer now anchored in the bay, reflected the moon's soft rays, and a stream of golden effulgence stole down the side of the mountain, and was lost in the impenetrable obscurity shrouding the houses and streets about its base. The atmosphere was singularly



clear. Objects at a distance seemed much nearer to the spectator than usual, and stood forth in bold, sharp outline. It was like a cosmoramic view; it seemed unreal, false; everything was unnaturally still. Surely life, with all its fevered impulses, was over; the world lapped for ever in lethargic slumber; human passion eternally suspended; everything that had been was a dream; there was no future, only a present, a present to be subtly felt and revelled in by the sublimer instincts of the soul, a present not to be disturbed by sound, by action, or even by thought, a present the intoxicating sense of which was to drink in by the thirsty spirit with silent, awe-like ecstasy.

But Villiers was a man not given to admiration of the picturesque, and these reflections did not occur to him. His eye was introverted upon himself and his own concerns; he had no time to meditate upon the beauties and lessons of nature, a man hard up for cash

rarely has. He had not proceeded far before his attention was arrested by a figure in front of him. He had been rapidly approaching it, but his thoughts had been at first so pre-occupied that it was only now that his interest in the figure was aroused. It was a woman, and a young woman, judging from her active, springy gait. The loneliness of the hour and place offered peculiar, and to Villiers, still heated by his debauch, irresistible temptations. He overtook her; boldly linked his arm in hers, turned her face towards him, and beheld to his astonishment—Sally Cook.

"Hullo! it is Sal, by all the gods! where's Gilner? Had a lover's quarrel, eh? He's got tired of spooning, has he? Give me a kiss, Sal—that's a good girl!"

He had snatched one.

"Let me go, Mr. Villiers!" cried the girl, struggling to disengage herself. She was terrified. She knew that Villiers was half intoxicated. His eyes glared upon her with



a drunkard's glittering stare; and she well knew the symptoms of inebriety from the nature of her calling.

Villiers smiled at her alarm and useless struggles.

"Be still, my cherub; don't flutter your pretty little wings so much, they are getting ruffled."

He placed his face close to hers and peered into her eyes with an expression that made her blood run cold. She had been too bewildered at first to think of screaming, but now her supreme terror found expression in a frantic shriek.

"Be quiet now, my little dove, or I shall have to gag you. Come — this way."

He endeavoured to drag her towards a clump of trees a little retired from the road. She fought like a young tigress; but he laughed to scorn her futile resistance, and easily carried her in his powerful arms,

cautiously keeping one of his hands over her mouth.

A loud cry caused him to pause a moment and look back. A man was making towards him at full speed. It was Gilner. The strength of the young fellow's love for his disdainful idol was such that he had followed her in spite of all. He had kept at a distance, so that she had not seen him. He had recognized the figure of Villiers hurrying up to her, but a turn in the road had prevented his observing what had taken place immediately afterwards, until, upon hearing the shriek, he had quickened his steps, and now threw himself upon the brutal ruffian almost in a moment.

"How dare you interfere with me, you young rat!" cried the desperate *roué*, all his blacker passions thoroughly roused, "take that." Villiers had put down his burden, still keeping a hold upon her to prevent flight, and now, turning on his assailant,



dealt him a staggering blow upon the chest.

Gilner, though brave, was no match for a man like Villiers, a man almost twice his size, of the highest type of muscular development, and perfectly at home in the science of pugilism. His only hope lay in impeding the movements of his antagonist in order to give Sally a chance to escape. With this object he wound his arms tightly around the body of Villiers, and called upon the girl to fly for her life.

Villiers with one hand still detained her, with the other he was about to deal another heavy blow upon Gilner, when a voice in calm, icy tones stayed his arm. "Make but a move, sir, and I fire." He looked up and to his surprise saw Smith standing a short distance off, with a revolver pointed at him.

The chagrin of the baffled villain was revealed in a blasphemous oath. But his wits did not desert him. He quickly interposed

the body of Sally between himself and his new foe, and then in mocking tones urged him to fire.

Smith quietly stepped towards him, cool as far as appearances went, but internally with his blood boiling. Although of a phlegmatic temperament, the nature of Smith was intensely chivalrous. This attempted outrage upon Sally, the nature of which he had inferred from the piercing shriek that had smote upon his ears, thrilled him with an intense hatred of Villiers, compared with which all previous feelings of animosity towards him seemed as *water unto wine*.

Had Sally not been in the way of his ready aim, he would most certainly have had the blood of Villiers upon his head. As it was, he came on with the deliberate intention of lodging a ball in some part of the scoundrel's body. The scene was transpiring not far from the house of Preston Jones, around which poor Smith had been hovering in the

hope of catching a fleeting glance of Florimel through the window, or in some other accidental fashion. In spite of all his philosophical plans for the subjugation of his unhappy passion, it still consumed him. Love was still the lord of all. Every night, after feverish hours spent in dissipation at Diderot's Rooms, would Smith take a circuitous route homeward and scan the windows of Jones's house in the hope of seeing at least the shadow of his beloved. He had been rarely gratified even in this humble hope; but love still chained him to the spot, and he hovered about it night after night, heart-sick and weary, but hopeful still, hopeful from some indescribable feeling in his breast that all his cold, marble-hearted philosophy failed to entirely extinguish.

When within a foot or two of Villiers, he again levelled his weapon at him with a steady hand, aiming at that part of his body unscreened by Sally.

"Scoundrel!" cried Smith, in a deep strong voice, thick with suppressed passion, "the law is impotent to reach you, but *this* is not."

The position of Villiers was far from enviable. Gilner still clung to him with a grip of steel, and fettered the freedom of his limbs; Sally hung upon his left arm and weighed it down so as to render it of no service either for attack or defence; in front the cold barrel of Smith's revolver threatened instant death. It was enough to sober him, and it did. His life hung upon a thread. A single twitch of Smith's forefinger, and he was a dead man. He glared upon Smith like a wild beast at bay, and nervously drew back his right arm, bent, even if the breath was almost to leave his body, upon expending all the remains of vital force he possessed in having a fair blow at him.

Another instant and all would have been over. But in that single instant the terror of Sally proved his salvation. The moment

that she felt Smith close to her, she abandoned the arm of Villiers and caught wildly at her preserver.

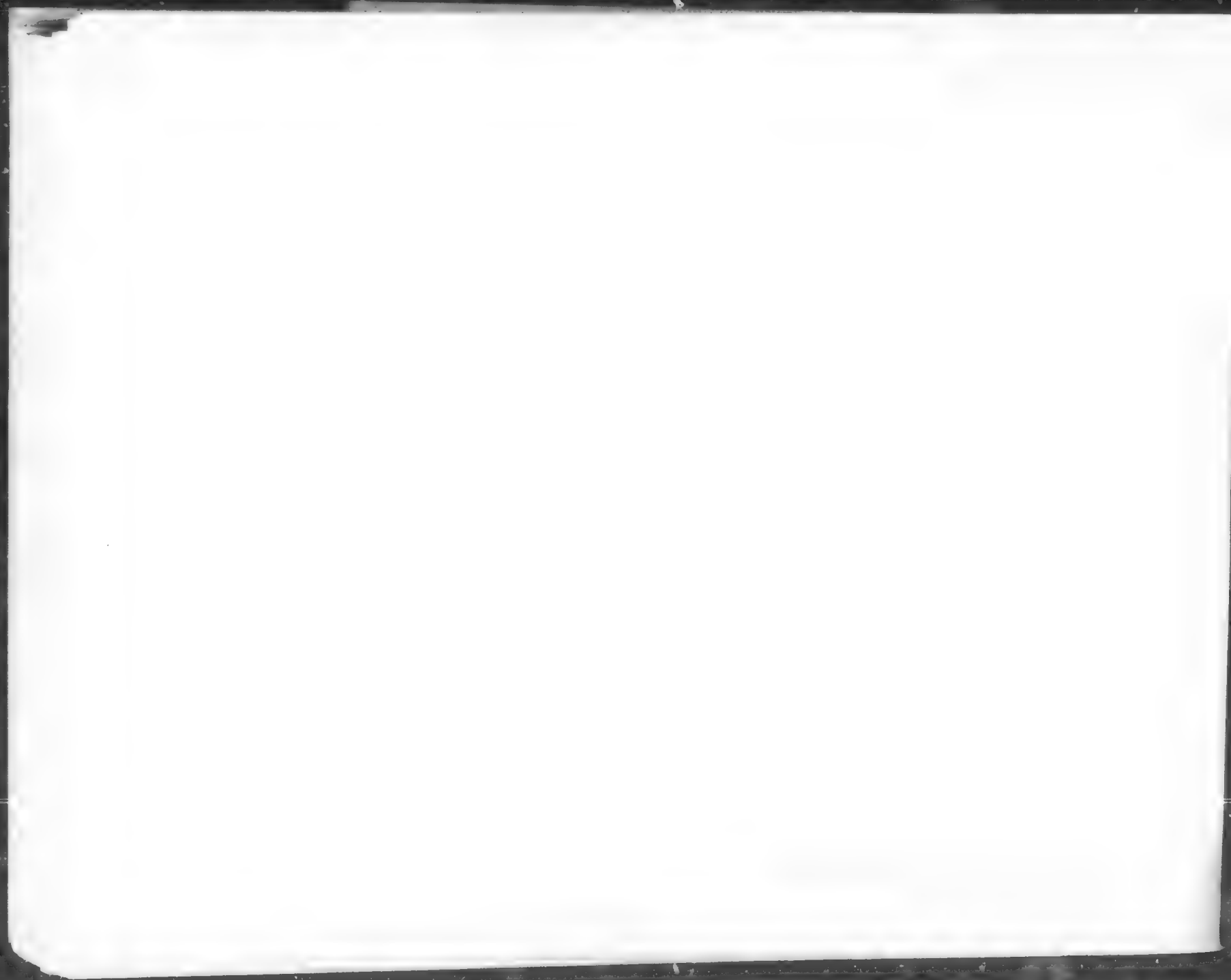
"Thank God!" cried she, gasping. She had done a fatal thing for Smith. She had deranged his aim. His ball missed its mark. The next moment down, full upon Smith's unprotected form, came the crushing blow of Villiers. He went down like a reed, the back of his head striking against a projecting stone. He did not once move. He lay coldly still, his face upturned to the calm sky.

"I've killed him by ——!" ejaculated Villiers, after a minute's pause. "I said I would, and I have done it. God help me!"

He broke away and rushed from them.

Sally threw herself upon the prostrate body of Smith in a paroxysm of grief and despair. She called upon his name, and kissed him a thousand times, but there were no signs of life in his white, fixed face. Presently she perceived to her horror that his head was

lying in a pool of blood, and then she swooned. Gilner gazed upon the spectacle awe-struck, while the stars above and the pale moon shone on in composed, glittering, unconscious splendour, as if there were no such things as stormy human passions, love and jealousy, lust and anger, pride and hate.



CHAPTER XVIII.

A CONFESSION.

FLORIMEL, upon the abrupt departure of Villiers, briefly informed her sister of the ill success of that over-confident gentleman's suit.

"But you don't mean to say that he really made you an offer?" said the elder lady, in a sceptical voice.

"It is quite true, dear Marion. It was done in such an astonishingly cool manner too. He actually had the impudence to assume that I had accepted him, and was going on making arrangements upon that assumption, until I had to let him see pretty plainly

that he was in error. Only fancy his trying to kiss me, Marion, a bold, bad man like that!"

"But of course you did not let him, my dear?"

"No, indeed, and then his look was something frightful; it was so threatening and malignant. He said that my refusal of him was all your fault, and that he would remember you for it. He is a terribly revengeful man, Marion, I am sure of it."

"Pooh! my love, a fig for his revenge. He knows me too well to think that I should care for his threats. But what do you think, Florimel? you have dismissed the very man whom papa so much wished you to marry."

"Me, dear Marion?" cried Florimel, much surprised; "I thought that he meant me for—for—you remember that evening, dear Marion?"

She checked herself, greatly embarrassed. She wanted to mention Smith's name, but felt herself tongue-tied.



"Ha! ha!" laughed Mrs. Clarke, confused herself, "you mean Smith. Oh, no! He means me for Mr. Smith, of all the persons in the world. But really it was only this morning that he gravely advised me to counsel you what to say to Mr. Villiers in the event of his proposing to you. Of course I laughed at the idea of such a thing. But he seemed bent upon it. I suppose they had been discussing the scheme together. I am so glad, Florimel, that you have defeated their little plot. I could not bear that horrid Villiers for a brother-in-law, I hate him."

"So do I, Marion, almost. But dear papa will be angry with me, I fear. I wish that I had known his wishes before."

"Why, my dear? it ought not to have changed your mind in the least. You surely would not thus have sacrificed yourself?"

Florimel smiled sadly. The words touched a great chord in her heart. Sacrificed herself! Had she not already sacrificed herself? What

mattered any further sacrifice? Her father wanted her to marry Villiers. Very well, she was ready to marry him, to marry any one that her father wished her to. To sacrifice her prejudices against Villiers and marry him seemed a small thing compared to the sacrifice she had made on the altar of sisterly affection, and made, she believed, uselessly. It might be indeed, that a marriage with Villiers would tend to perfect her noble work of self-abnegation, by at once and for ever shutting the doors upon any hopes of Smith. Once united to Villiers, she would doubtless soon be forgotten by Smith, who then, Heaven only knew! might be drawn towards her darling sister, for whom she was ready to lay down her life. Florimel knew that this conduct on her part was chivalrous, and very much out of the common. She was pursuing a course of high-minded virtue, and pursued it purely for virtue's sake. But it crucified her sometimes. The desperate trial of her

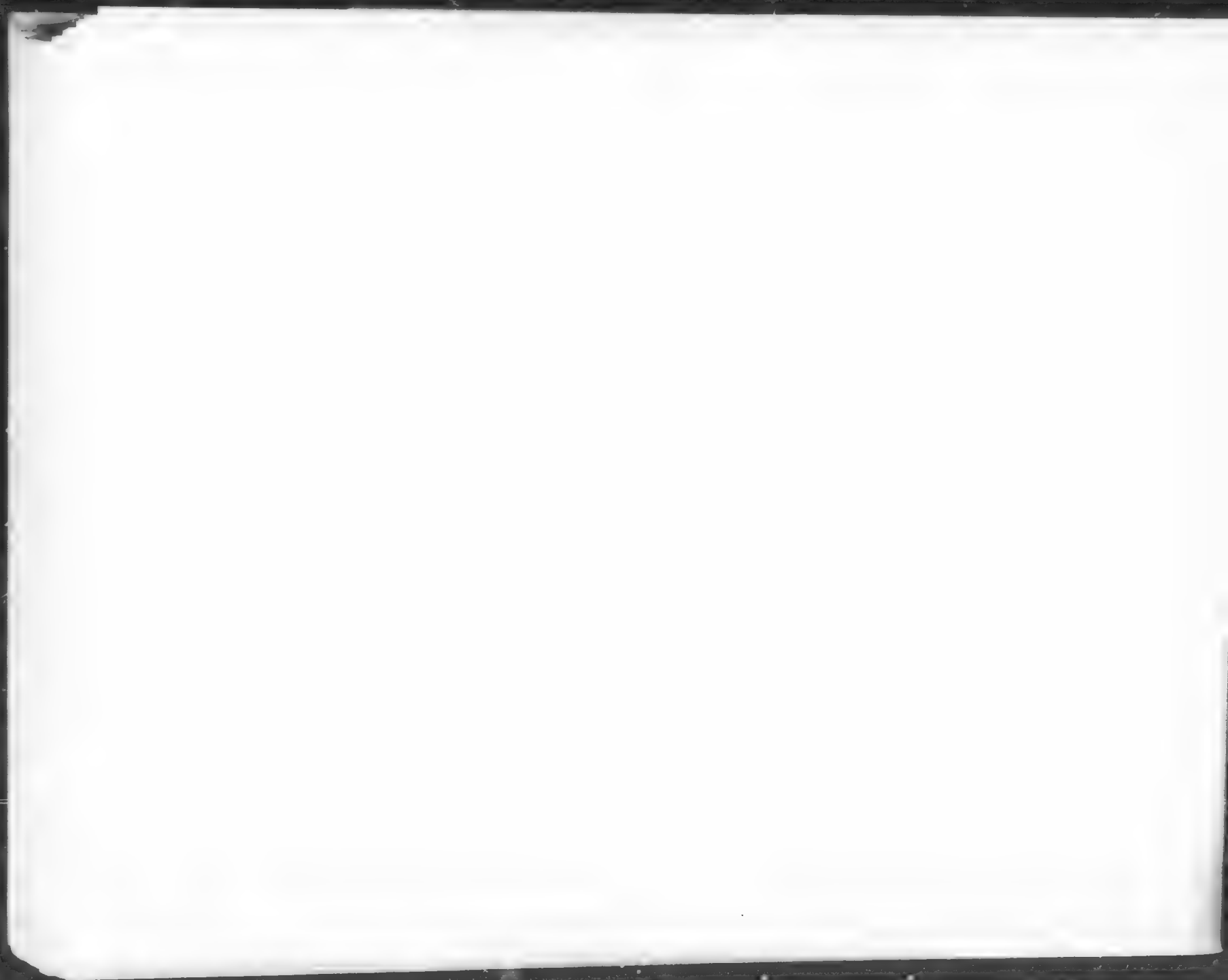
moral courage that her actions involved taxed her powers to their utmost. If Smith had not said that he loved her, the task would have been easier. But, knowing that he loved her, the ordeal was rendered more terrible, it was a fiery furnace, seven times heated. It was telling upon her too, telling upon her physically. She was the mere ghost of her former self, of that gay and happy Florimel whom we first knew. Her energy and sprightliness seemed to have fled for ever. In their place brooding melancholy reigned, closing up all the sweet fountains of joy and gladness still latent within her. Mrs. Clarke had frequently pondered upon this great change. It was a change that recent illness but indifferently accounted for. She had probed Florimel about it in vain. The secret was preserved intact. But it made Mrs. Clarke very nervous and anxious. She did not like Florimel's sad smile at all. A young girl, with life and its dreams before her, to smile so

pitifully as she did, as if existence was a mere nullity, everything a blank, seemed to Mrs. Clarke perfectly incomprehensible.

"My dear Florimel, now you *must* tell me what it is that is preying upon you. I have a right to know. Am I not your sister? Why keep a secret from one who loves you as I do. Come, confide in me, my darling, and let me share your trouble. I claim this concession from you, Florimel. It is a sister's privilege."

Mrs. Clarke rose as she was speaking, and, approaching her sister, kissed her on the cheek in a manner inexpressibly tender and compassionate. Florimel was shaken by a sudden tremor. Her emotion, so long, but at last vainly suppressed, overpowered her. The flood-gates of her soul burst their bounds, and she wept convulsively. She caught her sister's hand and pressed it against her bosom.

"My poor, poor darling!" said the other,



secretly glad at all this, for she thought that Florimel's sobs would bring relief to her; it was better than moping and suppressing them at all events. "My poor, *poor* darling! Now come and sit on my lap as if you were a little girl again, and tell me all about this great bugbear that is working you so much mischief. Tell me."

The kind-hearted woman seated herself, and took Florimel upon her knees.

"I can't, dear Marion; it is something that I may tell you by and by, but not now. No, no, not now; I couldn't."

"Very well, my darling, I can wait; but not long, my love. You are getting ill, Florimel. You *must* tell me shortly. When, dearest?"

She kissed her fondly. Florimel looked up and smiled faintly through her tears.

"I will tell you, Marion, as soon as you and Mr. Smith are married."

"As soon as I and Mr. Smith are married?"

Why, Florimel, what has Mr. Smith to do with it? Besides, my darling, if you wait until then, I am afraid you will wait a long time. Mr. Smith, my dear, has evidently *cut* us."

"I know he has, dearest Marion, and that is what it is that makes me feel so miserable. It is on my account, Marion; I was unpardonably rude to him, and he has not been near us since."

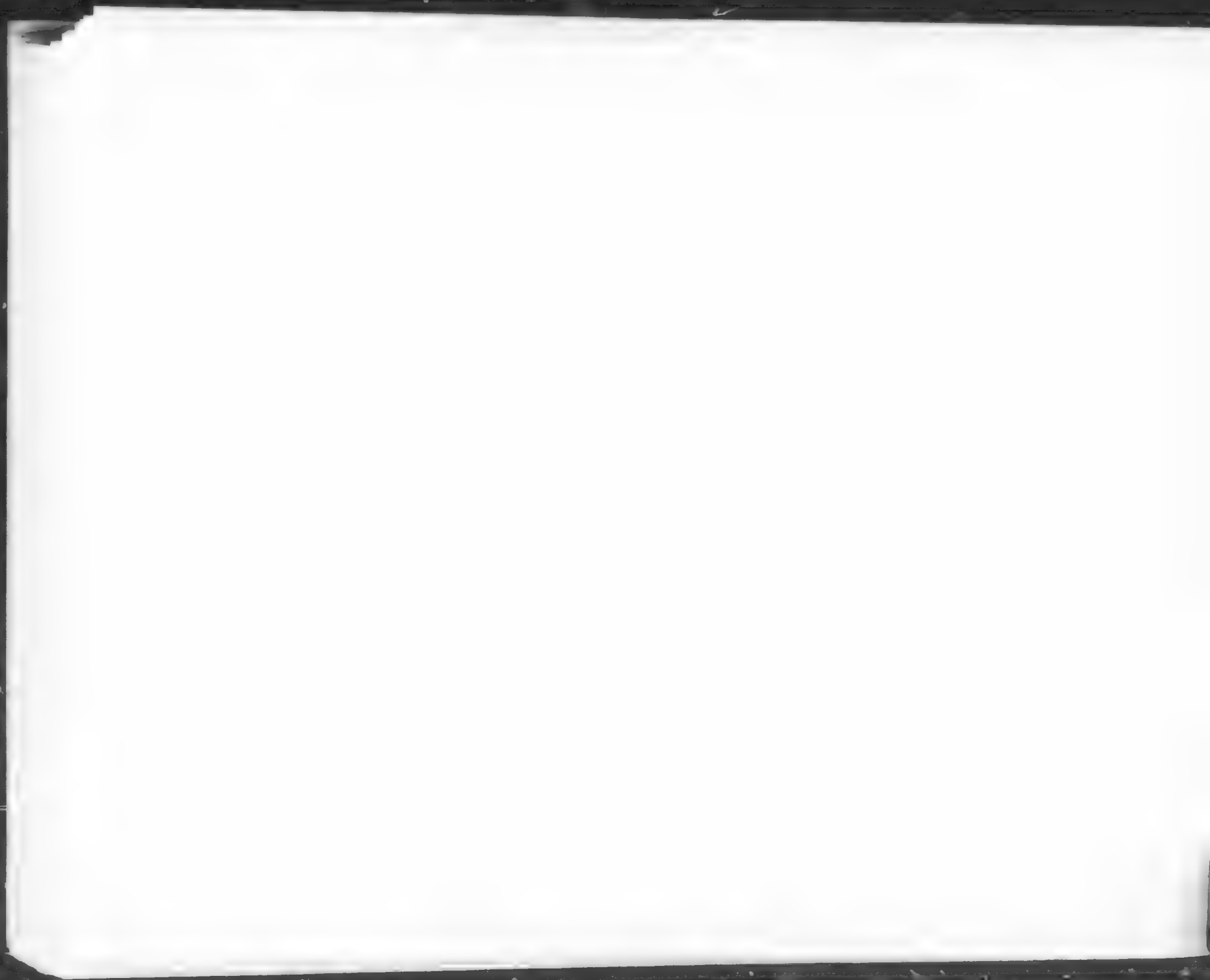
"When did this happen, my love?"

"The day that I was taken so ill," said the other, looking down.

"Ah! I see it all, Florimel. You are in love with Mr. Smith, my darling, and that is the secret of your trouble. You are pining away because he does not come here."

"No, no, Marion, don't say that; it is not true. But I am grieved for your sake, Marion, because I know you love him, and I wanted you to—to marry him."

"Well," replied Mrs. Clarke, smiling, "that



may be well enough, but hardly accounts for your being rude to him, my dear."

Florimel thought that this was said a little tartly. She feared that Marion was angry with her, or, at any rate, suspicious of the truth of what she said; and the sensitive girl burned under the thought. She answered, not without a little haughty indignation, and, perhaps, somewhat stiffly,—

"I was rude to him, dear Marion, because I thought it my duty."

"Your duty? Why?"

"He proposed to me, Marion, and I had always looked upon him as a suitor of yours."

Mrs. Clarke was astounded. She stared blankly in her sister's face. Had a bomb-shell burst at her feet, she could not have been more struck with astonishment. "Proposed to Florimel? What! Smith, her Smith, propose to Florimel? The world was coming to an end, surely. Of all the improbable things that might have happened,

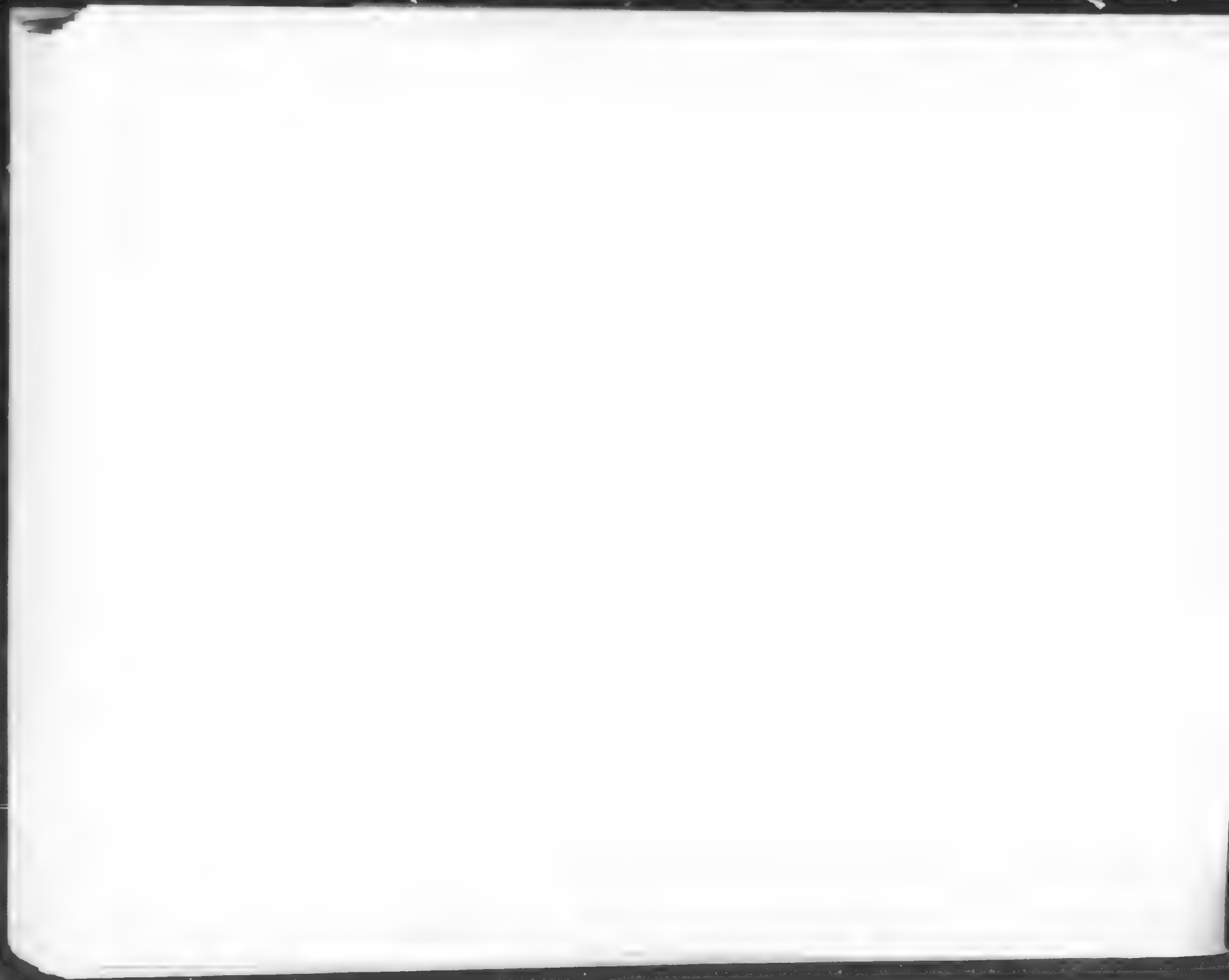
she had come to regard this as the *most* improbable. And yet when she came to think coolly upon it, there was nothing so very improbable about it, after all.

But it was very wicked and unfeeling of Smith, his paying her so much attention, and being all the while secretly in love with her sister. Smith was a brute, a heartless brute. She would never forgive him, no, not to her dying day. Then she involuntarily thought of the dreary blank in her future life that the defection of Smith meant, and groaned aloud.

This was too much for Florimel, who had been anxiously watching the effect which her words had produced.

"Dear Marion, don't look so, please; all will yet be right. He will come here again; I am sure of it; and when I am married to Mr. Villiers all will be—"

"No, Florimel, you are mistaken. He will never come here again unless you ask



him, and then he will renew his addresses to you. I see it all now; I deceived myself. It was you of whom he was thinking all the time. What a fool I have made of myself, to be sure! Florimel, my darling, you must solemnly promise me one thing, and that is never to breathe a word to your husband about my being in love with him."

"My husband, dear Marion?" repeated the astonished girl.

"Your future husband, Mr. Smith, my dear. Do you think that I am blind, Florimel, not to read the feelings of your heart towards him? You shall marry him, Florimel, of that be sure. I am going to invite him to tea to-morrow night, and then, my love, we shall both do our best to scare away from you that horrible giant Despair, who has had you so long in his clutches."

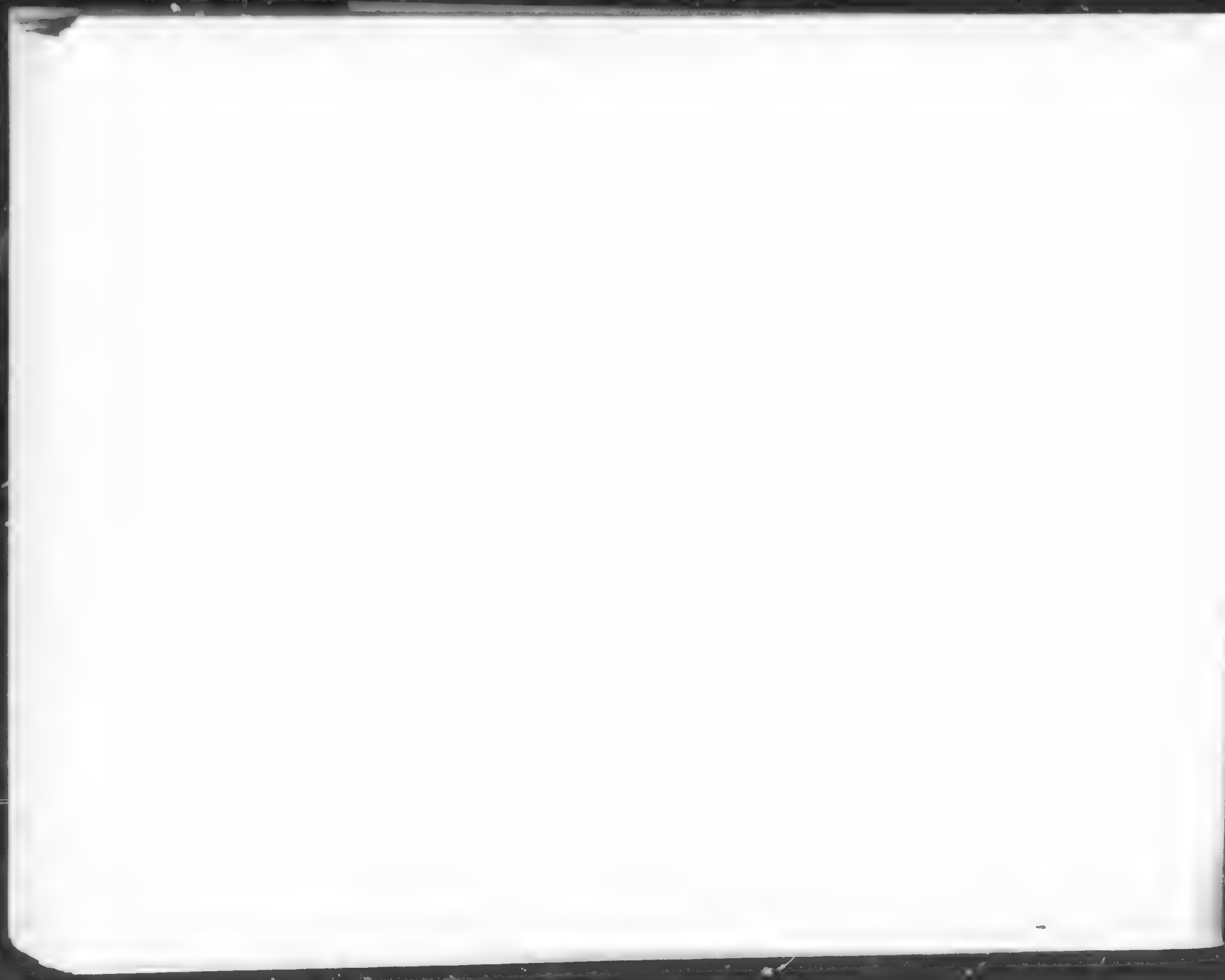
Florimel looked fixedly at Marion, and seemed hardly able to credit her senses. Had

she heard aright? Was Smith really given over to her, actually her property?

"Oh, Marion, Marion, what can I say to you? You are too kind, too good, too self-sacrificing. It is more than I deserve."

"More than you deserve, Florimel? What nonsense! Don't you see, my dear, it is only a virtue of a necessity that I am making? Smith is not for me in any case. You spoke of self-sacrifice. I am a heathen compared to you, Florimel. It is you that were going to make the self-sacrifice; Heaven bless you! now kiss me and dry up those tears; and never keep a secret from me again. But after all, it was not so much of a secret, for how could any one help loving that dear, delightful fellow, Smith?"

Florimel could not help smiling at the light-hearted, bantering tone in which this was said. Then she threw herself into her sister's arms, completely overcome.



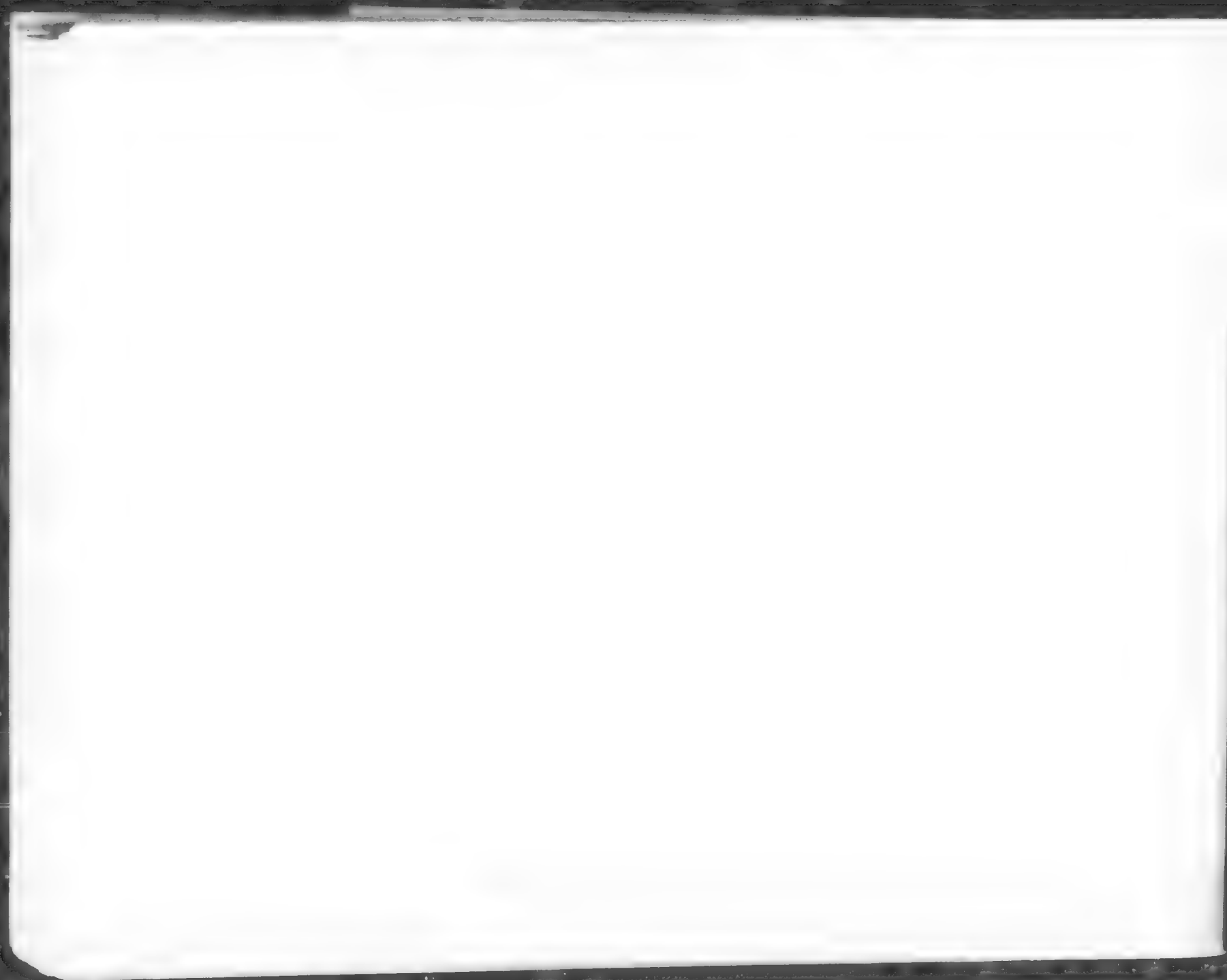
CHAPTER XIX.

LOVE, THE LORD OF ALL.

FLORIMEL and Mrs. Clarke, full of the emotions set into action by their mutual confidences, did not retire as early as usual. They lingered in the boudoir, discussing Smith with unwearying zeal. It was while they were discussing him that the frantic shriek of Sally Cook reached their ears; and very shortly afterwards the report of a pistol. They were thrown into consternation. The whole household was alarmed. Mr. Jones summoned his coachman and butler, and proceeded in the direction whence the sounds had issued. The three men were armed with

incongruous, but doubtless very effective weapons at short ranges; a poker, a pitchfork, and a carving-knife. But they had no occasion to use them. A few steps brought them right upon the body of Smith. He was insensible, but breathing very perceptibly. Gilner had been using all his efforts to bring Sally out of her swoon, and, having now succeeded, assisted in the conveyance of Smith to the house of Jones, Sally following in the rear, and weeping piteously.

Mr. Jones took the precaution to tranquillize the ladies as much as possible, and prevented them from seeing who it was for whom he had acted the part of the good Samaritan. A doctor was sent for. The injury was found to be only a simple fracture, and the patient by this time quite conscious. All cause for anxiety on behalf of the wounded man was now dissipated. But Jones, still wary and guarded, forbore to reveal to his daughters the identity of Smith until the following



morning. Sally Cook, in the meantime, resolutely refused to leave the side of the sick man. He was her preserver, she said, she would never leave him.

When Mr. Jones, at the breakfast-table, carelessly told them that it was no other than Smith whom his roof was sheltering, the astonishment of the two ladies may be imagined.

"Smith, my Smith, dear Jack?" almost screamed Mrs. Clarke, starting to her feet.

"No other, my dear, I assure you," remarked her father, composedly. "You need not be at all alarmed; he is getting along famously. No serious injury; he was only stunned a little. If you ladies will quietly finish your breakfast, I shall have great pleasure in taking you to see him."

"Oh! bother breakfast, we must see him now!" cried the elder daughter.

"Yes, dearest papa," pleaded Florimel, with a beseeching glance.

"All right, my dears, and so you shall."

Preston Jones swallowed a mouthful of coffee, and escorted his daughters to the bedside of Smith.

Smith's back was towards them when they entered. His head was bandaged. It looked very shocking, that horrible bandage; the ladies almost fainted. At the side of the bed sat Sally. She had not slept a wink all night. There she had sat watching and attending him in mute anguish. Now Smith was not in a bad way, by any means. He had all his senses about him, and, having learned that he was in the house of Jones, felt almost happy at the prospect of spending a week or two there, for would he not by these means in all probability see the adored of his soul, the beloved of his heart? At the moment, therefore, of the ladies' entrance, Smith was lost in a glorious day-dream of happiness. He was thinking of Florimel.

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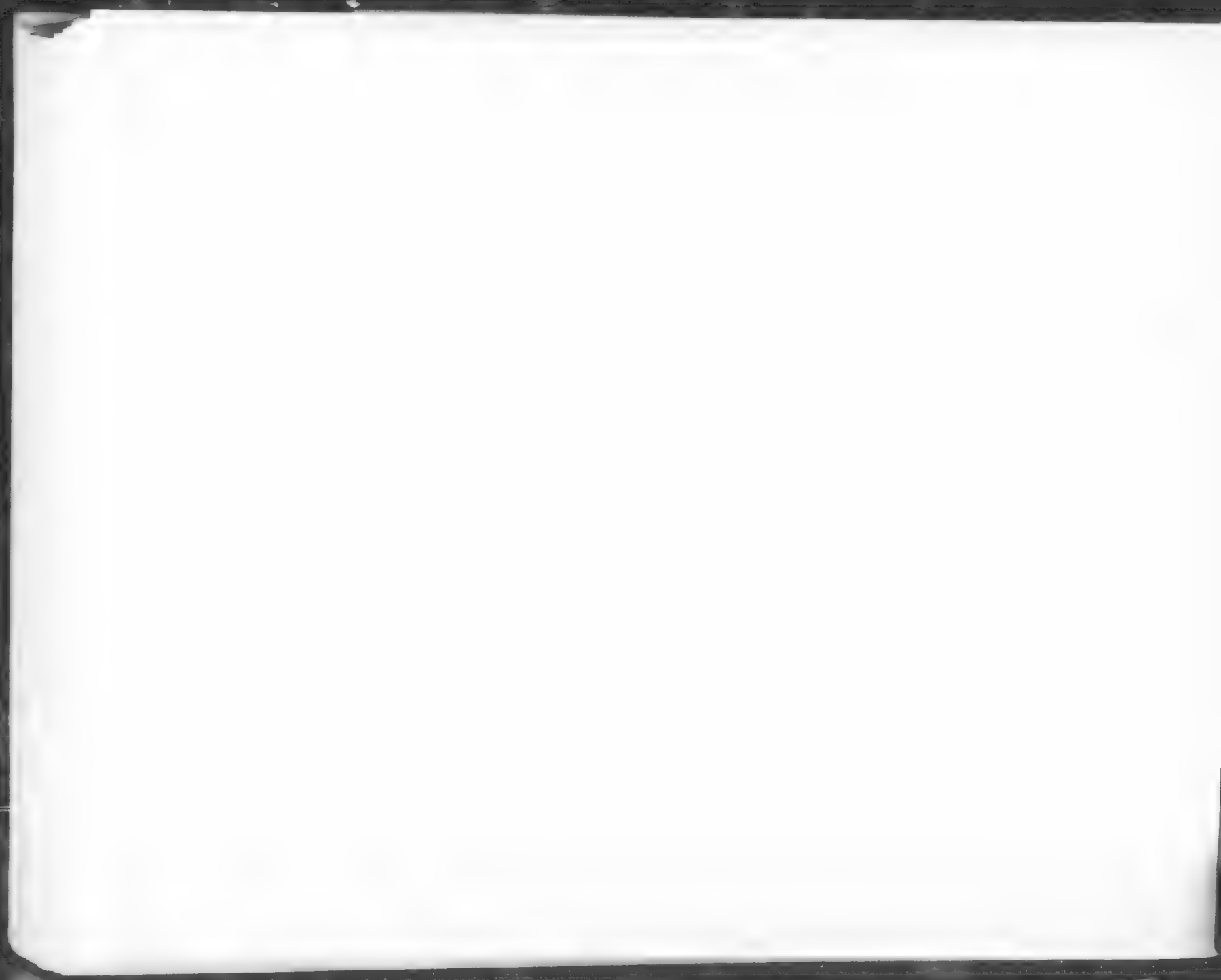
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The ladies approached him on tip-toc. They were afraid to disturb him. Not so Jones. "Hallo, old fellow! How do you feel now? Here's a brace of ladies come to see you."

Smith started and turned quickly. He looked straight at them. But he did not see Mr. Jones; he did not see Mrs. Clarke; he only saw Florimel, saw her looking at him with an ineffable expression of tenderness, sympathy, anxiety and love. He could realize her presence only. All else was vague, misty, undefined.

"Florimel! my own!" cried he softly, all his soul going out to her, and his eyes speaking intense love, if ever the eyes of man spoke it.

"Go and kiss him—quick," whispered Mrs. Clarke, "and we'll leave you together." Florimel advanced.

"Come, papa," cried Mrs. Clarke, with her woman's charming tact, "you and I will finish breakfast, and perhaps this young lady

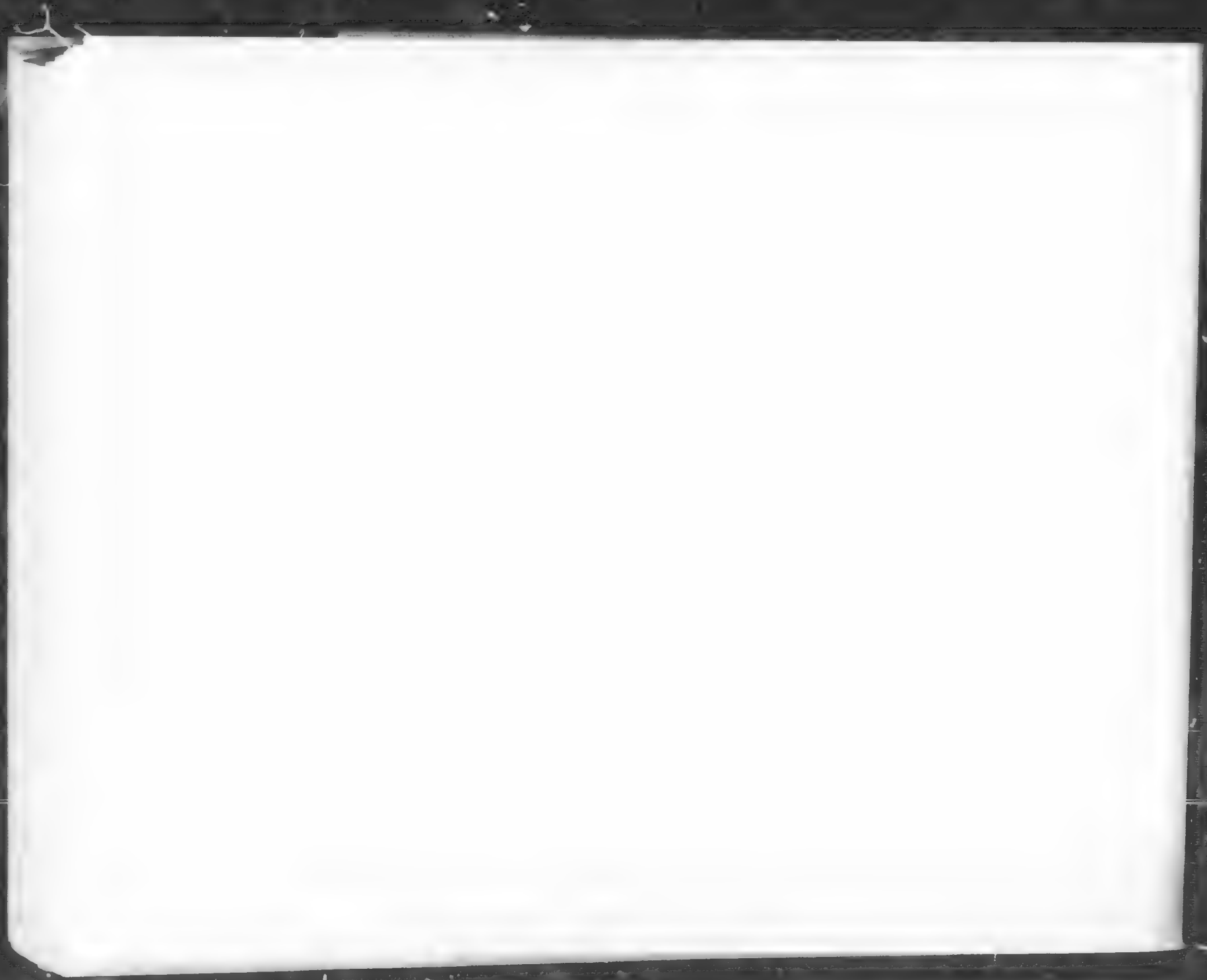
will be good enough to withdraw for a few moments."

She was beckoning to Sally Cook, who obeyed her mechanically. That single word "Florimel," uttered with such meaning as Smith had thrown into it, sounded like a knell in Sally's ears. It told her that Smith loved, that he loved with all his soul, that he was lost to her for ever. She obeyed Mrs. Clarke's gesture mechanically. What else could she do? Poor girl!

• • • • •
It is summer.

Three months have slipped away, three joyous months, for Florimel and Smith. They are living at a country house in Topsail, a Newfoundland watering-place, twelve miles distant from the town of Coldwell.

It is the first week of the honeymoon, all honey and moonshine, of course. The happy Smith took his bride for a stroll about Topsail.



"Do you know, Florimel," said the happy husband, looking down into the sweet, loving eyes of his young wife, "do you know that I have been a big fool all my life?"

"I do not, indeed," answered she, earnestly. "Marion says that you are the cleverest man she ever knew. You know you are, dearest."

"Never mind what *she* says, Florimel. She doesn't know. Listen. I have been through life a great thinker. I do not mean a clever thinker, but an industrious and unceasing thinker. I thought a great deal about intellect, Florimel. I thought that it was God, that it was the highest, the most supreme thing in the universe. By some philosophers, Cousin for instance, it is maintained that to create is simply an act of a *Supreme Intelligence* untrammelled by material dross. The mere thought of such an intelligence assumes substance and shape; it becomes a created thing, man or beast, wood

or stone, simply by the spontaneous action of *Supreme Intellect*. I argued from this theory that the more I divested my mind of the cloddish encumbering material with which it was freighted, the grosser senses, the concerns of life, the commonplace links of association binding me to the mass of humanity, the nearer I should approach unto *Supreme Intelligence*, an Intelligence unemotional, self-contained, just, everlasting, infallible. It was a kingly ambition, was it not, Florimel?"

"Yes, dearest."

"Well, as might have been expected, I achieved a signal failure. The more I struggled to stifle sensation, impulse, passion, the more rampant it became. My foe was hydra-headed; it mocked at and bewildered me. I was like the ball in the Indian game of *La Crosse*, thrown hither and thither, dancing, now upon one range of feelings, now upon another. At last, Florimel, I was tossed fair and square

into the goal; and here I am, at peace and happy. The most absurd part of it all, my dear, is the small part my will or my intellect played in the business. It was all impulse."

"Wh, not call it love, Love?" said Florimel, sweetly.

Smith looked at her for a moment, with a thoughtful air, and then smiled.

"You are right, dearest," said he, "I believe that Love is more than Intellect. Love is lord of all."

He bent towards her and kissed her.

"Indeed it is!" cried she; "I think that the word Love is the sweetest and mightiest on earth."

"Ay, or in Heaven," rejoined Smith, rising; "come, dearest—see, the sun is setting. Let us go in."

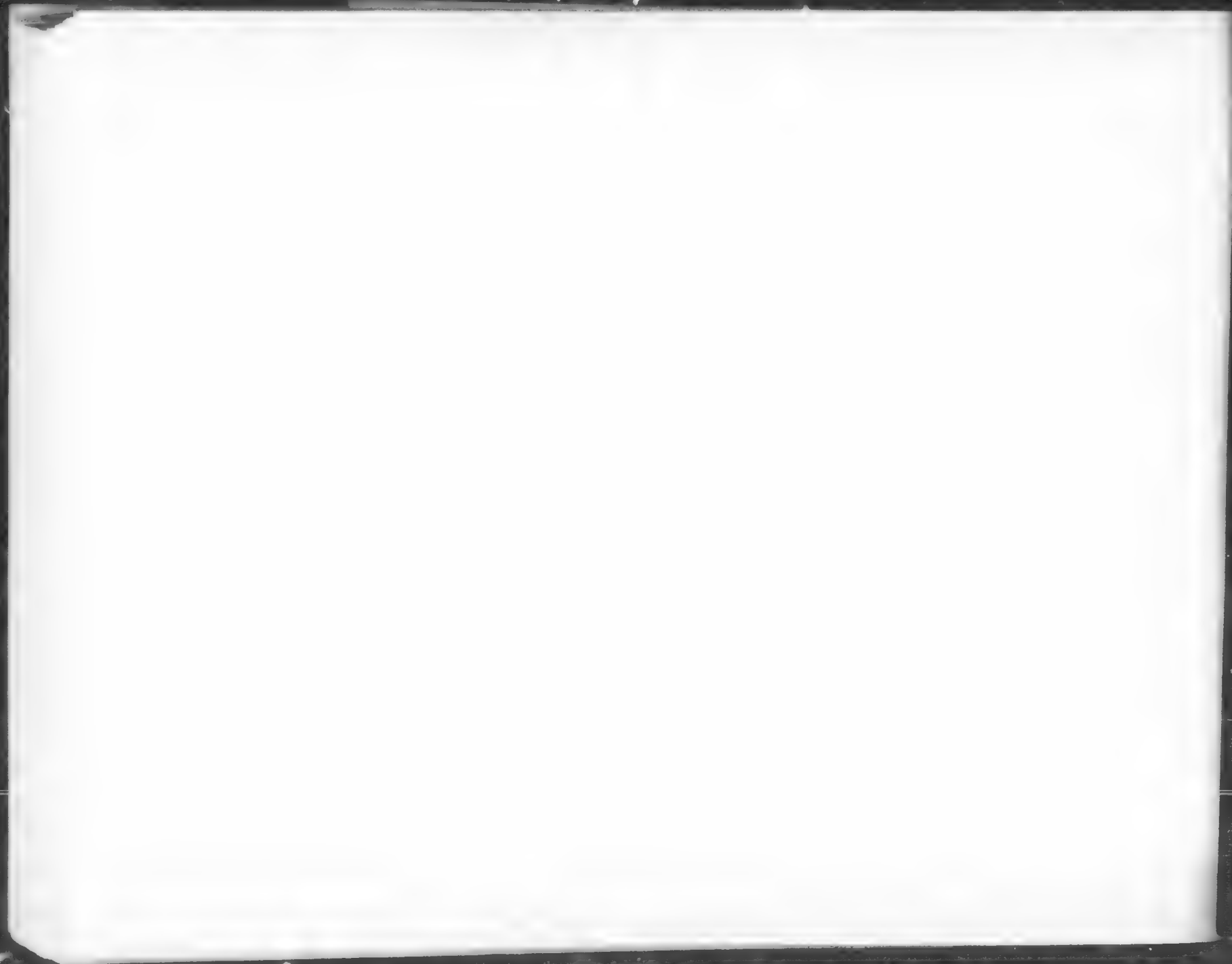
CHAPTER XX.

POOR SALLY.

"As if that name,
Shot from the deadly level of a gun,
Did murder her."

ROMEO AND JULIET.

SALLY COOK was dying; consumption had set its fatal mark upon her. She no longer waited behind the bar at Diderot's Rooms; that page in her life's brief history was turned over for ever. She was very frail and weak, with just sufficient strength left her to raise herself in her bed; for her end was fast approaching; with rapid strides fell disease was marching upon the citadel of life. The news of Smith's marriage was the final drop in her cup of



misery. It did not surprise her, this news—she had been preparing herself for it. It was Smith's avowal of the fervour of his passion for another in the single word "Florimel," that had crushed her. But your little women have great souls. No one suspected that a dagger had been plunged into her heart. She had for six months faced the world bravely. The customers at the Rooms little dreamed that her laugh and jests were all forced, unnatural, empty. Gilner did not like the sound of them, though. His senses, sharpened by love, detected a wild strain in her mirth greatly at variance with her natural humour; but he could do nothing to mend matters; he could only listen and suffer. Then came the dread moment in which her insidious enemy had thrown off the disguise and stood forth boldly, in true colours. Consumption! There was no mistake about it. The doctor all along knew that there was no mistake about it. Now Pierre Diderot and

Gilner, and all the frequenters of the Rooms, knew that there was no mistake about it. Another barmaid stepped into Sally's shoes. Yes, that page in Sally's book of life was indeed turned over.

She was dying, gently dying. Life was ebbing away, oh! so placidly. It hardly seemed like death, but nevertheless she knew that it was. She had sent for Gilner. She knew that she had wronged him. He came, poor fellow! and sobbed like a child when he saw her small wan face, and took her thin, wasted hand in his.

She motioned her attendant away.

They were alone.

"Tom," said the dying girl, solemnly, "I shall soon be in the presence of my God. Don't weep for me. I don't deserve it. I have done you a grievous injury, Tom, but my punishment has been terrible. Don't speak of it, Tom, for God's sake don't speak of it! It has killed me."



"No, no, Sal, not killed you. You are not going to die yet. My God, I could not stand it. Don't talk like that."

"I must talk like it, Tom. I am dying."

She spoke slowly and with effort.

Gilner groaned in the agony of his spirit.

"I have sent for you, Tom, dear Tom," continued Sally, "to entreat your forgiveness. Will you—can you—forgive me? I mean truly from your heart."

The words were uttered with extreme difficulty. Her breath was getting shorter. Gilner knelt by the bedside, raised her in his arms, and kissed her on the forehead. He did not speak; he could not; his heart was too full. The action was enough. The girl was happy. That kiss, hallowed by a love saintly in its devotion to her, had sealed her pardon.

"Tom, dear Tom," whispered she, with a feeble, ghostly smile, "is your pipe with you?"

"Yes, Sal," gasped the agonized man, with a heaving chest, "But, for God's sake, don't talk of pipes now! It is more than I can bear."

"I know, dear Tom. But it is more than a whim; it is my dying request. Smoke."

She was speaking very faintly but with distinctness. Gilner hesitated. The request was a strange one; but a look at Sally decided him to humour her. His hands trembled; his frame shook. No, he could not do it. The pipe fell upon the floor.

"O Sal!" cried he, again supporting her in his arms, "this will kill me."

The miserable man quivered in his anguish and dropped his head upon her withered bosom.

The girl smiled again, but much more feebly than before, and laid her hand upon his head. A minute passed thus. Then Gilner raised himself suddenly. A dread presentiment had seized upon him. Yes.



It was as his soul had foreboded. A single glance was sufficient. The spirit of Sally Cook had fled, had deserted its frail tenement at last, and left it food for worms. He embraced a corpse.

It may have been some ten or fifteen minutes after this that the attendant, who had remained within call, became uneasy at the prolonged cessation of voices and sounds, and entered the room. Gilner was lying half upon the bed, half upon the floor. The attendant thought it odd.

She spoke to him.

There was no answer.

She spoke again.

Still no answer.

Now thoroughly alarmed, she approached and touched him. She started back with a horrified shriek.

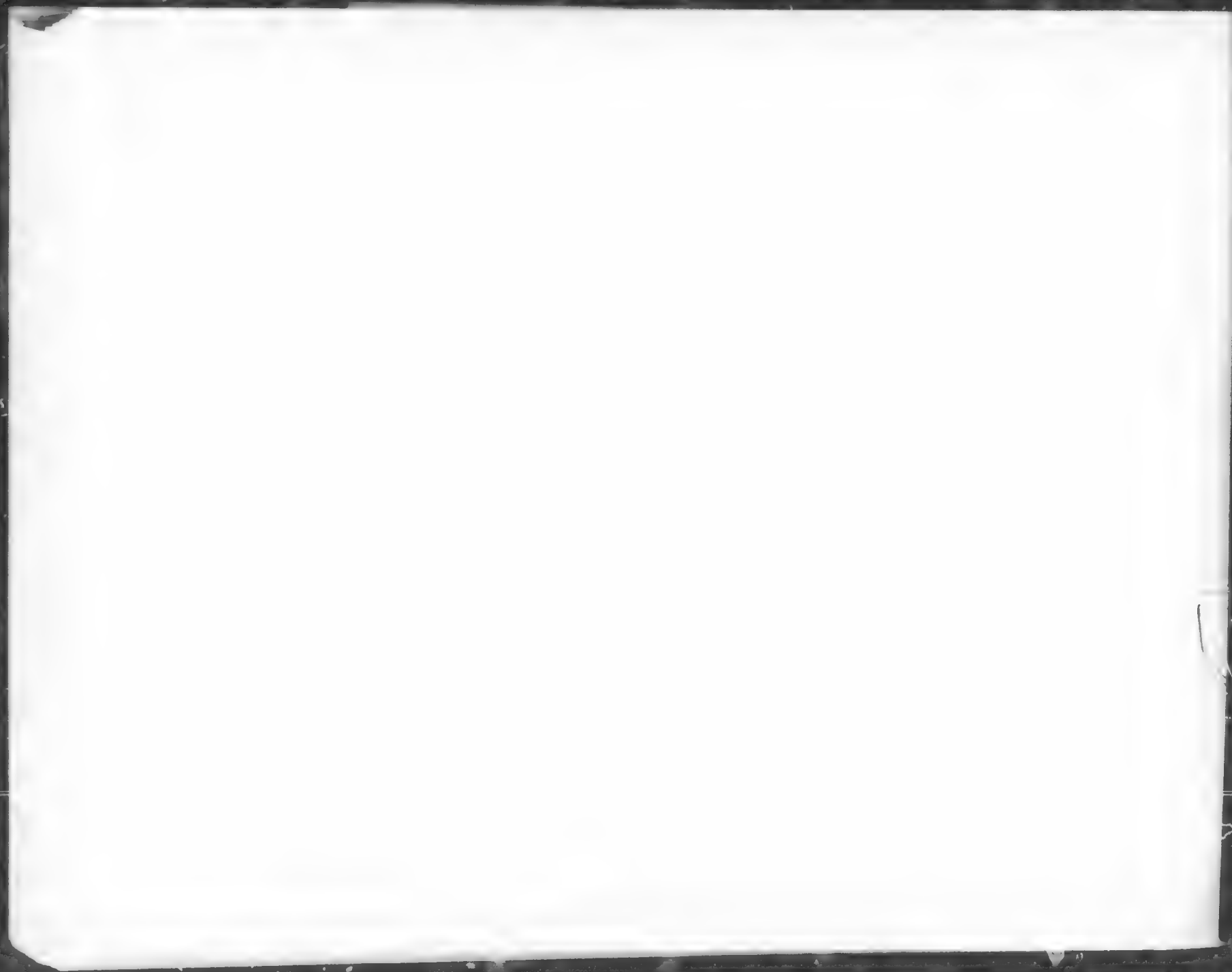
Gilner was dead, with the body of the lifeless girl locked in his arms!

Just twelve months before, upon the door-

step, had Sally uttered fetterless words which her lover had imagined binding as steel; now their union was of a surer sort, the union of death.

Those Northern Lights again! Once more they play around them, leaping and exulting over the dead bodies, as if to show that they were alike fleeting and evanescent. How they gleam and quiver in wanton, fickle flashes, then flicker, grow dim, and finally, like the lamp of life, go black out!

THE END.



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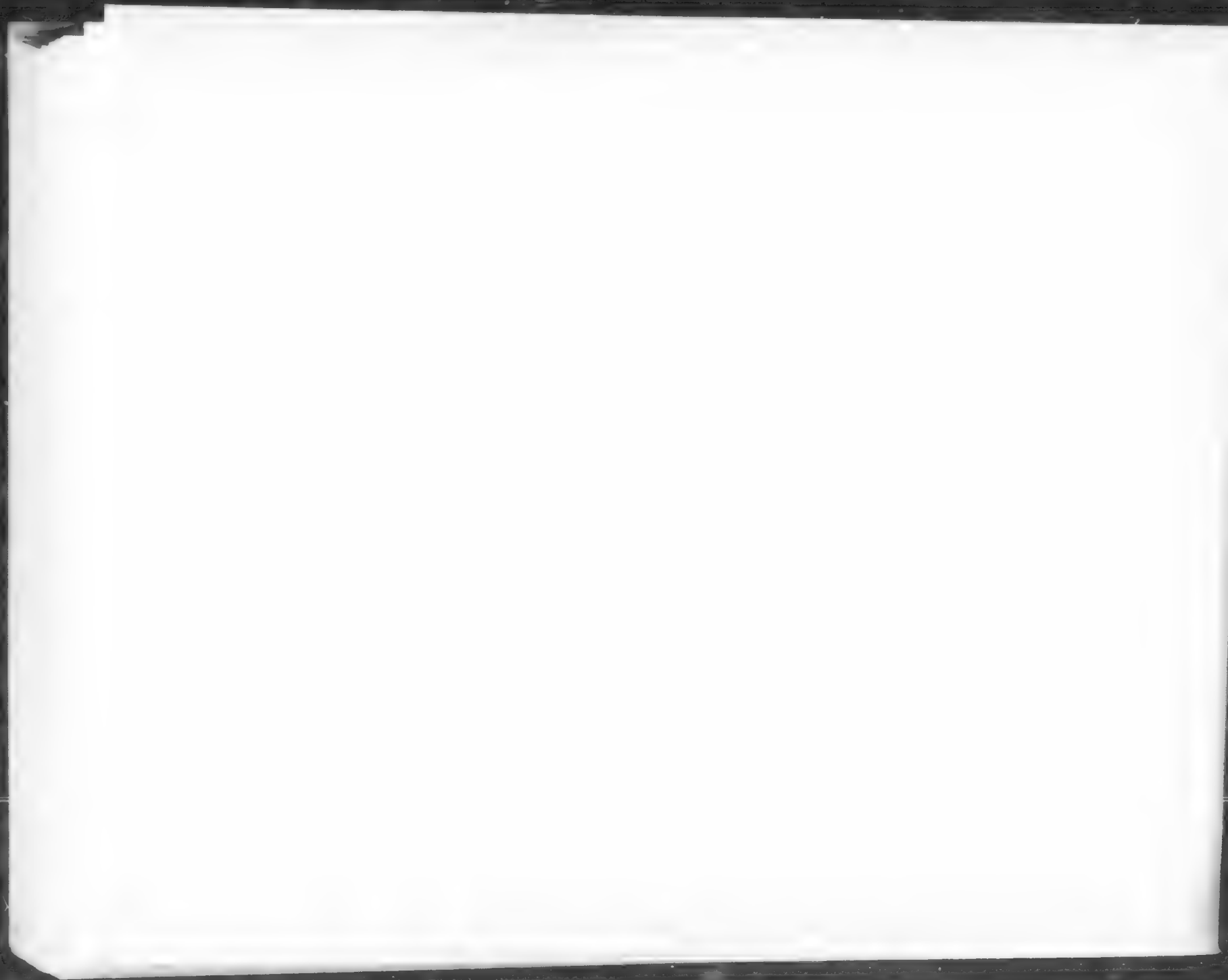


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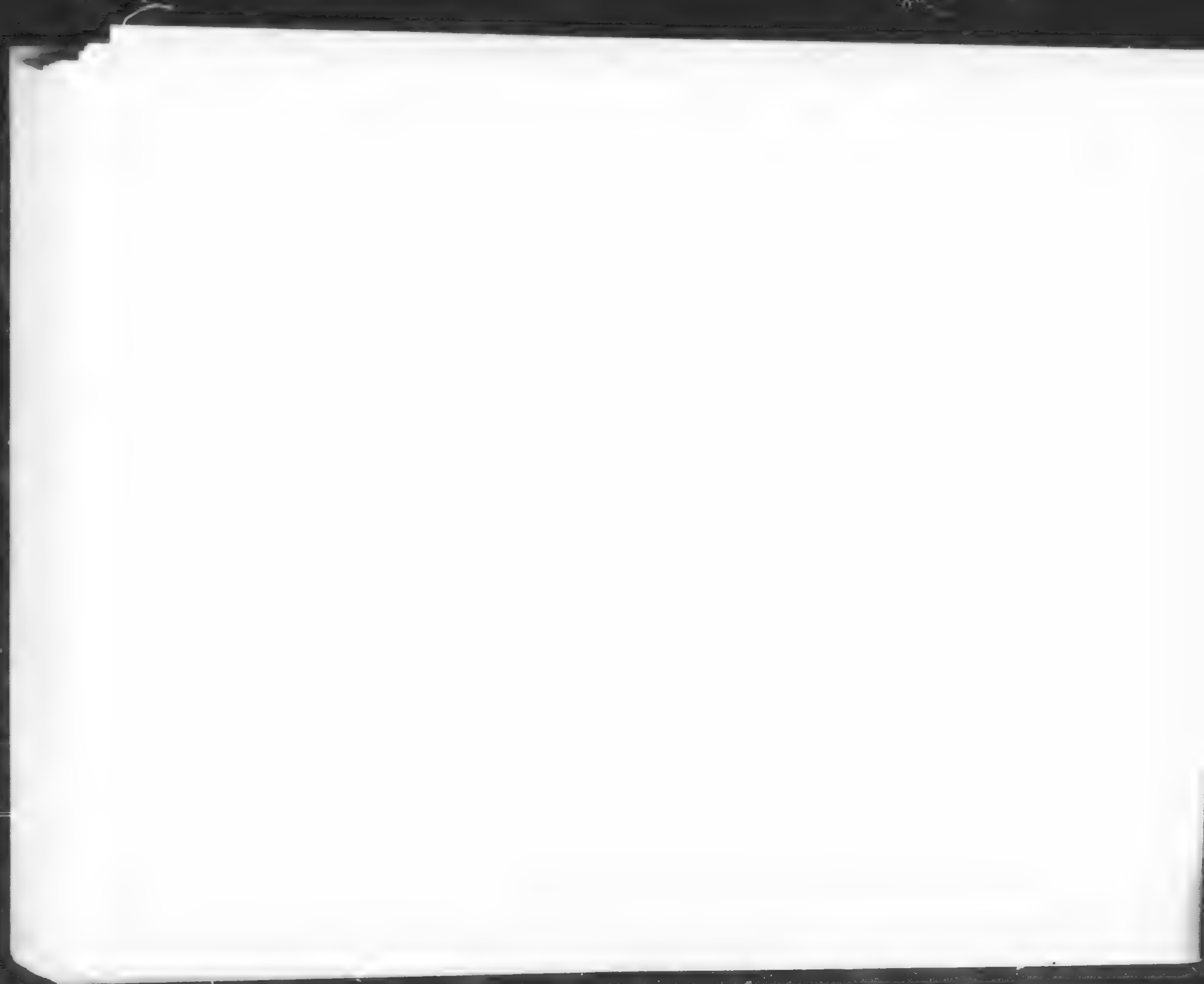
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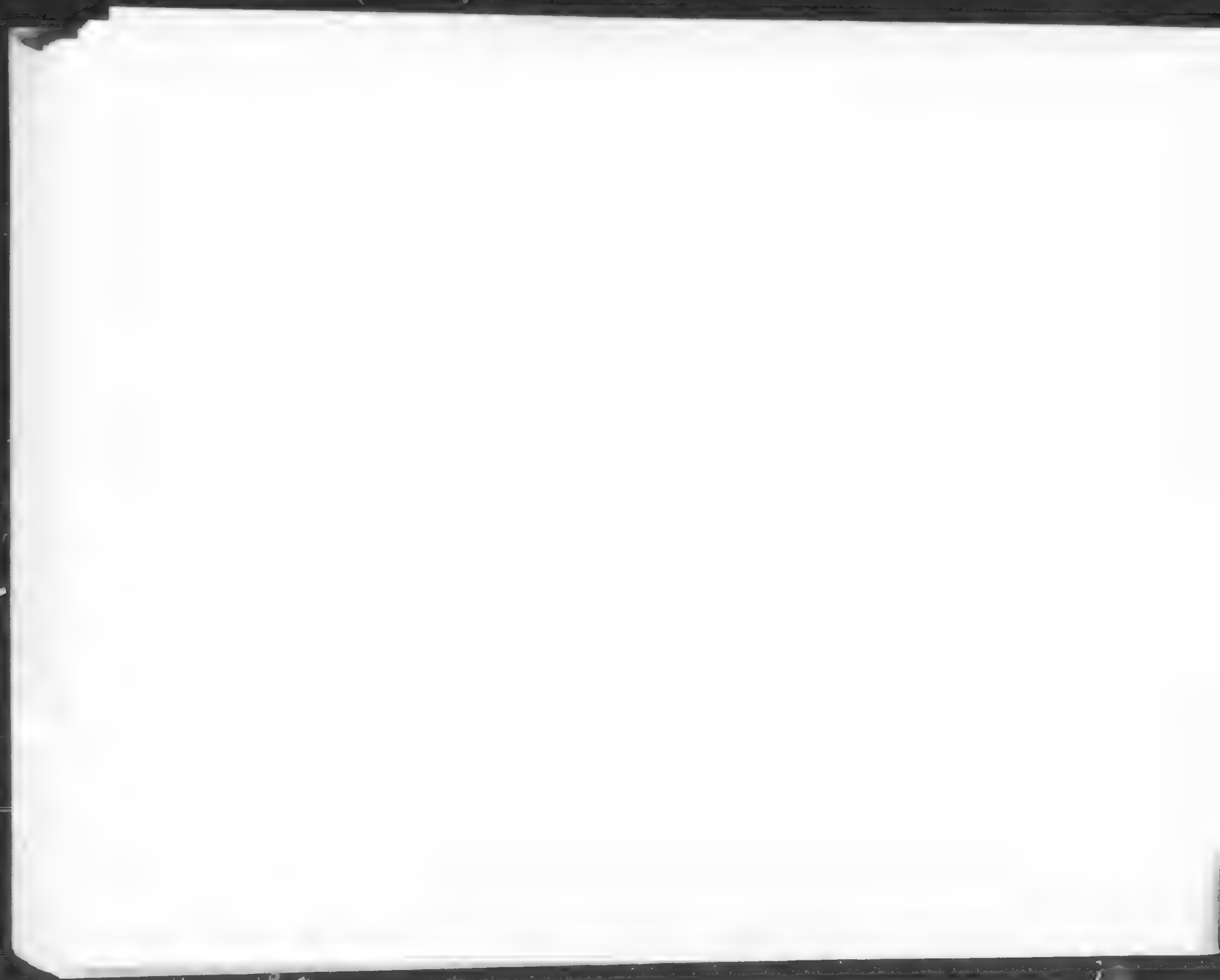
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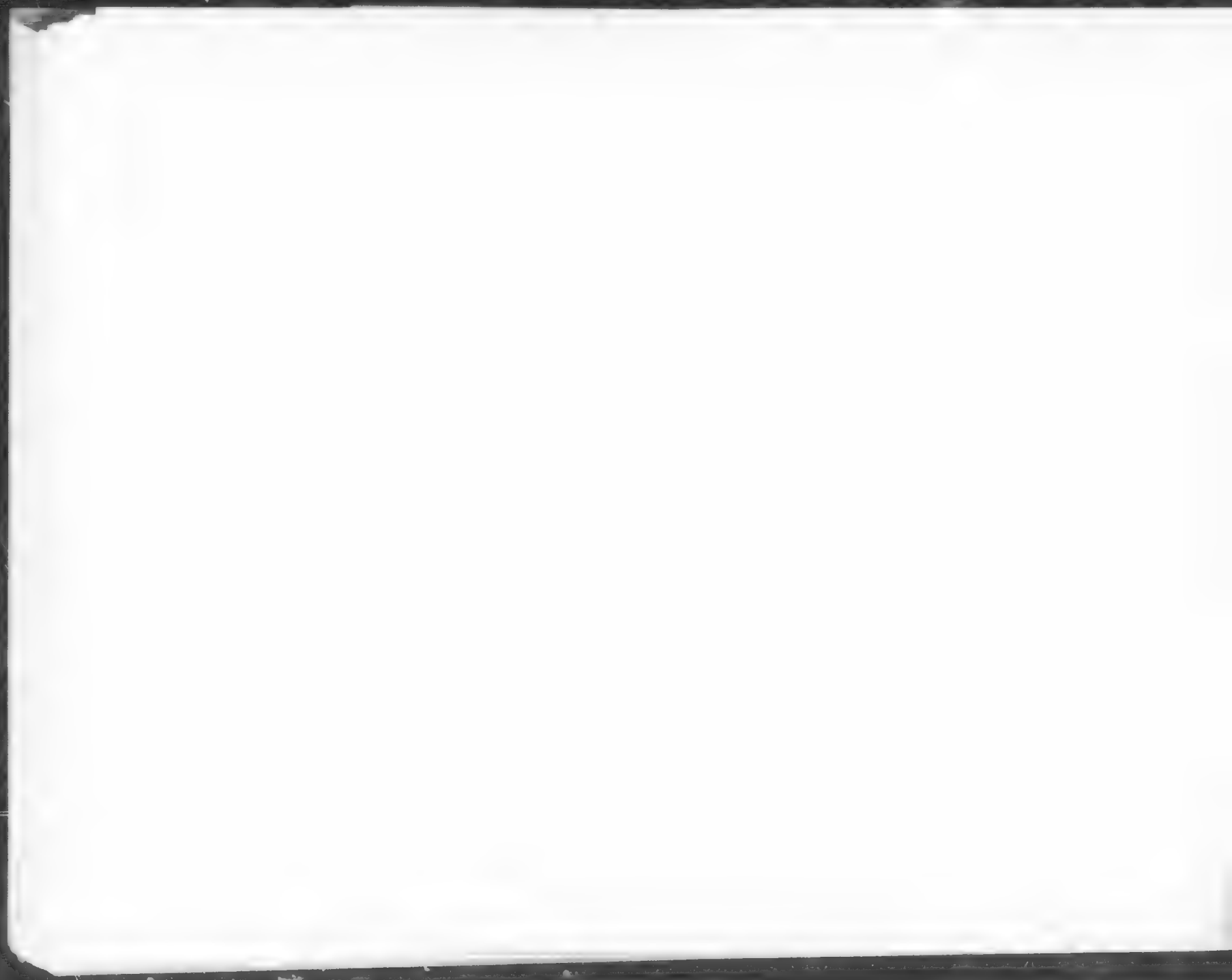
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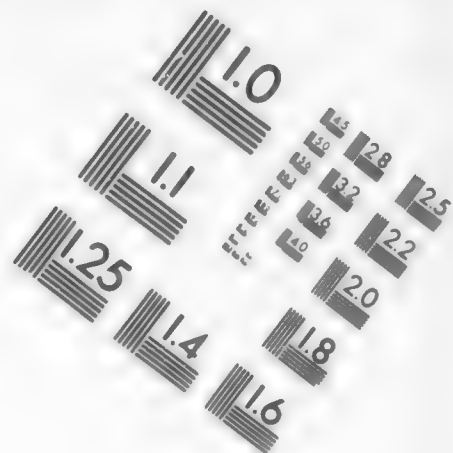
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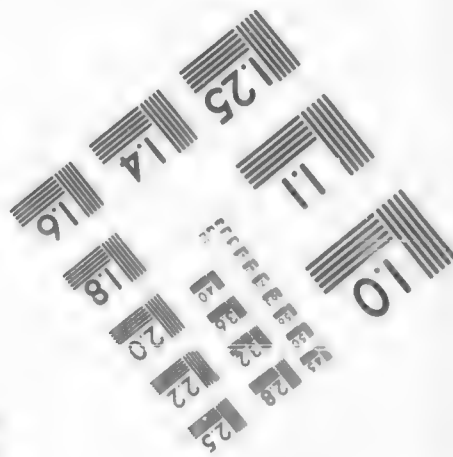
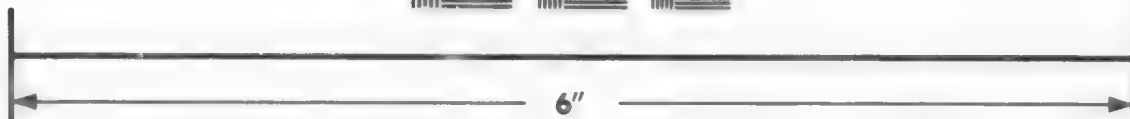
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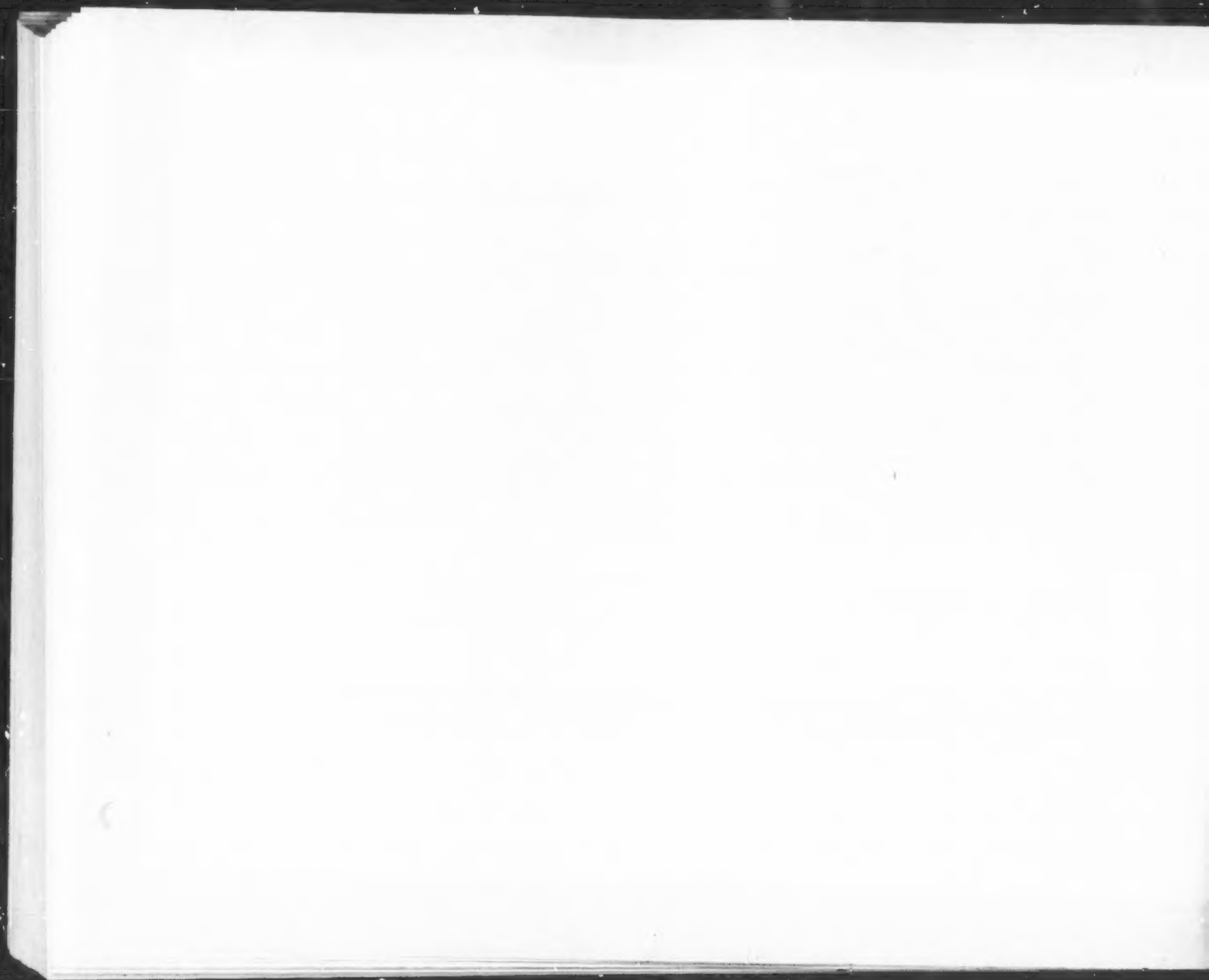
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